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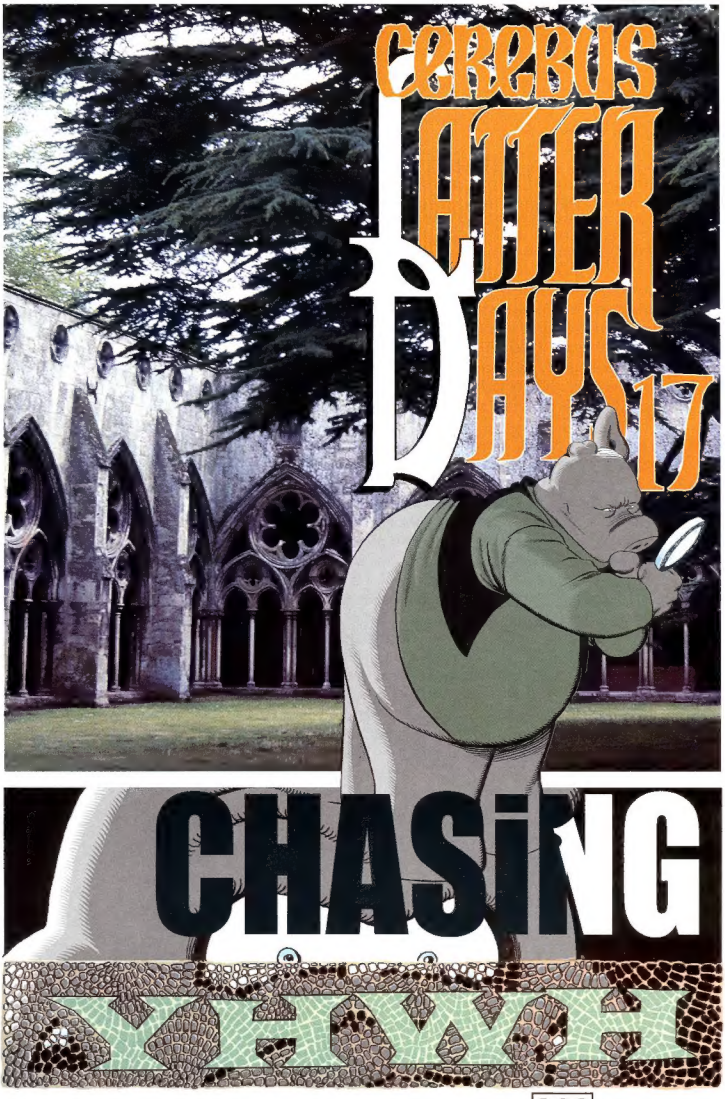

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CEREBUS
NO. 282 SEPTEMBER 2002

Letter to *The New Yorker*

Dear Sirs:

Owing to an unfortunate, for a general interest magazine, choice of anecdote, Art Spiegelman may have (I am sure, inadvertently) left some of your readership with the entirely mistaken impression that Bernard Krigstein's characterization of Mr. Will Eisner as "the enemy" ("Ballbuster," 22 July) represents anything other than a singular, largely inexplicable and wholly indefensible—albeit *fascinating*—prejudice on the part of the late Mr. Krigstein.

I feel safe in saying that Mr. Eisner is universally recognized as the single greatest pioneer in the "language" of comic-book storytelling, the innovator of many of those techniques and "breakdowns" which (as Mr. Spiegelman rightly asserts) Bernard Krigstein used to such good effect in his own work—work which occupies a place of undisputed high rank in the pantheon of "comic-book greats," (albeit on a plateau which is widely agreed to be somewhat below that of Will Eisner). I think it worth noting that, years after Mr. Krigstein had abandoned the field, it was Will Eisner who first coined the term—and made the first tentative explorations within the confines of—the "graphic novel" and is, even today, recognized as one of its greatest practitioners (as is, one hastens to add, Mr. Spiegelman, himself).

It would be of interest to many of us with a life-long absorption in the comic-book field to read—preferably in some "industry" publication where those space constraints implied by a general interest publication would not be a problem— Mr. Spiegelman's speculations on what he would see as the *reasons underlying* Bernard Krigstein's extraordinary perception of Will Eisner as "the enemy".

Dave Sim,
Kitchener, Ontario

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Cover Photo

LATTER DAYS
•
PROLOGUE
(Cerebus 266
and 267)
•
BOOK ONE
(Cerebus 268 to
288)
•
BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 289 to
300)

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14th of Springmonth 71 - Hard to believe that mere HOURS from now, my carefree bachelor days - all THREE of them - will be over. Not to mention my EXCRUTIATING, STOMACH-Churning, MIGRAINE-inducing, ANXIETY-ridden bachelor days - all NINE THOUSAND or so of THEM.

I try to keep my brief, surreptitious visit to the loading dock of the Blind Lemon Oil Consortium at the forefront of my conscious mind: "How do you do? I'm the future Mr. Louie Lasso Louie Lasso. I was wondering what sort of time frame would be involved in shipping a seventy-five litre drum of lemon oil to this address?" STRICTLY 'off-the-books' - as a wedding surprise for my new bride." "We could have it there first thing in the morning, sir!" SIR! To have access to a guaranteed, unlimited supply of a world-class, all-natural lubricant at my disposal - night and day - and to be called "Sir" into the bargain. Maybe Cerebus is RIGHT. Maybe there IS a God. A God who moves in mysterious ways. And a God who (occasionally it seems) pays off like a pari-mutuel trifecta - where the win-place-and-show horses all went off as big under-lays - resulting in a Matrimonial Payday big enough to break the Connubial Bank and leave the Conjugal House begging for mercy.

Ah, Love!

It's a caring (and most especially) SHARING sort of thing: metaphorically all incisors, bicuspids and molars TEARING OFF huge chunks of rapturous mutual bliss, MASTICATING conjointly-owned rhapsodic jubilation and WOLFING DOWN bilaterally sanctioned synergistic euphoria.

Deep within my heart I sincerely feel now that the "bare cupboard" that was "Me" has been well and truly replaced by the virtually "bottomless cornucopia" of "We".

Mere fleeting hours, tripping by on gossamer running shoes; my thoughts unoccupied save with whimsical passing fancies like: How do I manage to overcome the head-to-toe paralysis which has held me IMMOBILIZED on this chair with my right arm cocked at a (somewhat jaunty) forty-five degree angle, my right hand, palm upward, balancing my top hat since early yesterday morning?

16th of Springmonth 71 – Disowned! I can't believe it. My ONLY CHANCE to better my social standing, in one giant upward leap onto the GOLD-PLATED rungs of the Class Struggle Ladder – and the rung I land on turns out have feet of clay (I'm so UPSET, I'm not only TORTURING my metaphors, I'm MIXING them in a furious, wisk-like, ice-skating, salad-tossing, card-shuffling, textbook metaphorical abreactional motion). DISOWNED! Because she dared to marry a Konigsberg! The DREAM of rubbing my relatives' noses in Allen Stuart Louis-Lasseo monogrammed hand-kerchiefs DASHED upon the shoals of the Allen Stuart Dumbrowski quicksand, beneath whose duet-bin whitecaps I feel myself plummeting. I try re-reading my earliest notes on Fraud, desperate for the relief I am accustomed to them providing: "8th of Steve 64 – I feel an immediate and profound admiration for Dr. Fraud's ability to use multi-syllabic words and compound sentences to obscure and, indeed, virtually ELIMINATE meaning, from human communication. For me, this represents the ultimate womb-substitute for which I've been searching, since being extruded from the genuine article in the profound and seminal betrayal of those wish impulses (originating, in my pre-conscious mind) to have everything, my own way. Or, at the very least, to have unlimited, lifelong, access to the services of a fully-accredited SCAPEGOAT." No relief whatsoever – only the word DISOWNED, dancing, like blazing seaweed before my eyes, snapping, furling, UNfurling, dulating, UNdulating, – the word engraving itself into my consciousness like... like pre-moistened towelettes: DISOWNED!

18th of Springmonth 71 – A note arrives from Cerebus informing me that he is, at last, ready to begin dictating his commentaries on the next part of the First Book of Moshe. I send him a note of my own telling him I'll be there – with BELLS on.

Cerebus:
Cerebus thought it was just an *expression*.

Konigsberg:
The wedding ring has rendered me…*invisible*…to the opposite sex, so I…I thought that a little…*auditory augmentation*…might help.

Cerebus:
Did it?

Konigsberg:
No. Evidently all it does is cause a slightly irritating…*tickling* sensation…in their ear canal as I pass by them [thinks] At *this* point I'll take what I can get.

Cerebus:
[thinks about saying something] [doesn't] [looks down at the Torah] Okay. [checks to make sure I'm ready] Chapter six. [thinks] Actually, the *end* of Chapter five, with Noah's sons, Sem, Ham and Japheth. Cerebus finally noticed something about the names the other day that turned out to be the whole key to the story: Sem, Ham and Japheth. She, He and It. [waits for a reaction] [Konigsberg tinkles one of his bells] Okay. Chapter Six. *"And it came to passe, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were borne vnto them: That the sonnes of God saw the daughters of men, that they were faire, and they took them wiues, of all which they chose."* [pauses] [thinks] It *should* be "of all *whom* they chose." [thinks] Just goes to prove that they didn't have any *Cirinists* back then. Nyuck nyuck nyuck. [Konigsberg and I both laugh politely] See, *here* you've got the two different *kinds* of men that Cerebus was talking about. You have the men who are just, you know, *men*—leftovers from the *last* time God told them to replenish the earth: [thinks] still being fruitful as hell [thinks] still multiplying like crazy. You know [chuckles] [mimes a "thumbs up" to the sky] "Can do, Chief!" [thinks] And then? And then, you have the *"sons of God,"* Adam's *descendants*, from the most *recent* time that God created a man out of the dust of the ground. [thinks] "Sons of God" who are all, basically, behaving the same *way* as the men. [clears throat] See, chapter *six* is what chapter *five* looked like from *Yoohwhoo's* standpoint. Chapter *five* was where all of Adam's descendants—cut off from the tree of life—*start* to live shorter and shorter lives until, eventually, they start dying. In *Yoohwhoo's* version of the story—chapter *six*—Adam's descendants *saw* the daughters of men, got the *hots* for the daughters of men, *left* their fathers and their mothers and *married* the daughters of men and…[thinks]…cleaved…? [thinks again]…clove…?

Konigsberg:
Clave.

Cerebus:
…clave to them. You know? Like your people used to hide in? Claves? [I laugh politely; Konigsberg grimaces] and that this is what *all* the "sons of God,"…*all* of Adam's descendants…*chose* to do. What Yoohwhoo is saying is "Nyah, nyah. I was right. You're *supposed* to *leave* your mother and your father and *cleave* to your wife." *"And the Yoohwhoo said, My Spirit will not always striue with man; for that hee also flesh."* Yoohwhoo is admitting here that she has something in common with men in that—just as a man has a spirit inside of *him* but he's *also flesh—being the earth*, she, too, has a

spirit inside her, but she's also flesh, *her* flesh being rock and sand and dust and stuff. [reads to himself] And then she uses "yet" the same way that she already used "for" and "therefore," that is, in a way that would make sense only to a woman: *"yet his dayes shalbe an hundred and twenty yeeres."* As always, it's hard to know *what* Yoohwhoo is trying to say. *"Despite* the fact that man is flesh, he will live a hundred and twenty years."? [shakes his head] If *that's* what she's saying, it seems like kind of a raw deal—if you ask Cerebus—considering that man *started out* at *nine-hundred-and-thirty years.* But, since Yoohwhoo is the one that men are calling on, *she* gets to decide how long they live. The nine-hundred-and-thirty years that *Adam* lived—to *Yoohwhoo*, that was *too* long. A hundred and *twenty* years? That sounds about right to Yoohwhoo.

Yoohwhoo, looking on the bright side—the bright side as Yoohwhoo sees it, anyway—points out *"There were Giants in the earth in those daies: and also after that, when the sonnes of God came in vnto the daughters of men, & they bare to them; the same became mightie men, which of old, men of renowme."* This, finally, becomes too much for God, especially after Yoohwhoo has let Adam die, cut off from the tree of life. So God disagrees with Yoohwhoo's assessment of chapter five. And God gives His *Own* assessment of chapter five and the first four verses of chapter six: *"And God saw, that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was onely euill euery day."* This, of course, is music to Yoohwhoo's ears, since all *she* wants to do is get back to the "God-and-Yoohwhoo-God-becoming-one-flesh" part of the story. So she picks up on what God is saying in the next verse, without missing a beat: *"And it repented the Yoohwhoo that he had made man on the earth, and it grieued him at his heart. And the Yoohwhoo said, I will destroy man, whom I haue created, from the face of the earth..."* and, while she's at it, she figures she might as well get rid of all the *rest* of these little creatures, too: *"...from man vnto beast, and the creeping thing, and the foules of the aire: for it repenteth me that I haue made them."* As far as Cerebus can see, God tries to get a little compassion out of Yoohwhoo at that point. *"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Yoohwhoo."* Right, Yoohwhoo? Huh? Who? Noah? Oh, sure. Everybody *else* dies, though, right? All these men and animals and creeping things and birds and stuff? Fine by Yoohwhoo. As long as everyone *else* dies, it's at least, you know, a step in the right direction. *"These the generations of Noah:"* Nonono, Yoohwhoo. Noah doesn't *have* any generations, not *yet.* Noah is *alive.* See? That's Noah right there. Yes. That one right there. Remember? With the three sons? The one who found grace in your eyes?

Yoohwhoo picks up on God's prompting and goes, well, a little overboard: *"Noah was a just man perfect in his generations, Noah walked with God."* Noah? Walked with God? Uh, well, actually, Yoohwhoo, that would be *really,* um, *stretching a point.* Let's just go back to the end of chapter five and stick with *"And Noah begat three sonnes, Sem, Ham and Japheth."*

Now that Yoohwhoo is all done interrupting, God finishes the thought that he started waaay back in verse five with, "the wickedness of man was great *in* the earth," explaining, in no uncertain terms, that man wasn't the *only* offender when it came to corruption: *"The earth also was corrupt before God: and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked vpon the earth and behold it was corrupt: for all flesh had corrupted his way vpon the earth. And God said vnto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before mee: for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold I will destroy them with the earth."* Which must've given Yoohwhoo a few bad moments. Wait a minute, wait a minute, she must've said: "*With* the earth?" So, then God tells Noah how to build the ark that will hold him and his wife and his sons and his sons' wives. Wives which God—kind of pointedly, Cerebus thought—doesn't name.

Noah and Sem and Ham and Japheth are descendants of Adam, "sons of God". Wives are, you know, just wives [Konigsberg tinkles one of his bells]. *"And of euery liuing thing of all flesh, two of euery shalt thou bring into the Arke, to keepe aliue with thee: they shall be male and female. Of fowles after their kinde, and of cattle after their kinds: of euery creeping thing of the earth after his kinde, two of euery shall come vnto thee to keep aliue."* The fowl get demoted from "his" kind to "their" kind, at this point, since God is about to formally declare them to be "lunch"—flying fruit, basically.

So, two of every kind, male and female. Then, starting chapter seven, it's Yoohwhoo's turn. *"And the Yoohwhoo saide vnto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the Arke: for thee haue I seene righteous before me, in this generation. Of euery cleane beast thou shalt take to thee by seuen seuen, the male and his female: and of the beastes that are not cleane, by two, the male and his female. Of fowles also of the aire, by seuen seuen, the male & the female, to keepe seed aliue vpon the face of all the earth."* See, Yoohwhoo notices that God has demoted the birds to "their" kind from "his" kind, so Yoohwhoo promotes them to being "clean" instead of "unclean". That female quality where, whatever it is that *you* say, the *first* thing that occurs to *them* is to say the exact opposite.

Konigsberg:
[rueful, twisting his wedding ring] I'm starting to find that out.

Cerebus:
The problem for *Noah,* of course, is that no one has told *him* the difference between "clean" and "unclean" beasts. In fact, Yoohwhoo herself doesn't get around to it until [wanders way, way down to check] [wanders all the way back] the eleventh chapter of the third book which is, like, hundreds and hundreds of years later! So, anyway, Noah has this big problem. *God* told him to take the animals by twos: male and female. And *Yoohwhoo* tells him to take the animals and birds by seven seven—whatever the heck seven seven means. Which Yoohwhoo leaves up to Noah to figure out. No matter whether he takes it to mean seven, or seven *times* seven—forty-nine—or seventy-seven, they're all odd numbers, so Noah has to decide whether to have one extra *male* or one extra *female.* So Noah...*Noah* decides that Yoohwhoo God meant "seven" and God told him two, one of each, so Noah decides to just split the difference. *"Of cleane beasts, & of beasts that are not cleane, & of fowles, and of euery creeping thing that creepeth vpon the earth, There went in two and two vnto Noah in the Arke, the male & the female, as God had commanded Noah."* Two and two. Two males and two females of each.

Konigsberg:
Hold it hold it [tinkling one of his bells] Time out. How do you know that? It says Noah did what God commanded. Maybe...maybe "two and two" is just a...another way of expressing it.

Cerebus:
[thinks] You could be right.

Konigsberg:
[astonished] I could?

Cerebus:
Aye. See, on the one hand, after the flood [wanders down to chapter eight][reading] *"Noah builded an Altar vnto the Yoohwhoo, and tooke of euery cleane beast, and of euery cleane fowle and offred burnt offerings an the Altar."* If Noah only took *one* male and *one* female of each onto the ark and all the others were *killed* in the flood, how could he sacrifice the clean beasts and the clean fowl without, you know, automatically making them *extinct* in the process?

Konigsberg:
Then [thinks] how can I be right?

Cerebus:
Cerebus is pretty sure that it was just a *regional* flood. The flood covers all of *Yoohwhoo's* world, but remember that all Yoohwhoo knows about are the four rivers—or, rather, the river that "became into four heads,"—whatever *that* means—and the garden that she grew and the fact that everything happened eastward of someplace called Eden. [thinks] Yoohwhoo is just a *little* yoohwhoo. She *thinks* everything on the whole earth was destroyed. But Cerebus is pretty sure that all God wanted to do was to destroy the garden, the good-and-evil-fruit tree, the tree of life, Hawwa and her immortal daughters and all the women and men and "sons of God" and daughters of men and the nighty men and the men of renown who were just, you know, doing nothing all day but *thinking* about beating crap out of each other and *actually* beating crap out of each other and becoming *famous* for beating crap out of each other and *thinking* about humping the daughters of men and *actually* humping the daughters of men. And the only way to accomplish that was to destroy every living thing in the area. God wanted to start the story over with this guy called Noah representing *Yoohwhoo* this time—rather than *Adam* representing *God* and then *Cain* representing God and *Hebel* representing Yoohwhoo. Basically, God "playing along" with Yoohwhoo: Yoohwhoo is God, Noah represents Yoohwhoo and Noah, like Adam did, has *three* "sons of God," Sem, Ham and Japhet. [talking to me] Make sure you put "sons of God" in quotation marks [Cerebus and Konigsberg take a break while I go back and do just that] [after I finish, Cerebus starts dictating again:] See, "*sons* of God" is *Yoohwhoo's* phrase. God doesn't *have* sons. He can make a man out of *dirt* anytime He *wants,* a man who will breathe air and get up and walk around and eat and drink and sleep and talk and think and [clears throat] will be *fruitful* and [clears throat again] *multiply.* But the men that God makes out of dirt aren't His sons any more than [thinks a while] a clay pot is a potter's son. [thinks some more] or any more than Yoohwhoo is a New God, or God's wife, or God's younger brother or God's half-sister, or God's wife's handmaid or God's daughter or any of the other crazy stuff Yoohwhoo comes up with as we go along. The men *and* Yoohwhoo are God's *creations.* Yoohwhoo is like a clay pot telling the potter that she made herself. [sighs] The Books of Moshe are the beginning of this very, very, very long argument that revolves around all these crazy ideas of Yoohwhoo's that she got from eating the bad fruit. So God—*who always lets his creations decide things for themselves*—God just lets Yoohwhoo come up with as many crazy ideas as she can and then men and women act out those crazy ideas so, hopefully, eventually Yoohwhoo will see how crazy her ideas are.

Konigsberg:
Which will take how long, do you suppose?

Cerebus:
"How *long?*" [thinks] Cerebus isn't God. Cerebus has no idea. Cerebus' best guess? "It will take as long as it takes for Yoohwhoo to run out of crazy ideas."

Konigsberg:
[rueful, twisting his wedding ring again] In other words…

Cerebus:
…don't hold your breath.

Konigsberg:
"She's just a *little* yoohwhoo"?

Cerebus:
Aye. [thinks] One of *Big* Yoohwhoo's "handmaids". [gesturing with his magnifying glass at the next section of the Torah] Like Hagar is to Sarah [gesturing at a distant point in the Torah] or like Zilpah is to Leah and Bilhah is to Rachel. As soon as Yoohwhoo started telling *her* version of the creation story and it became obvious that the *only things she* knew about were the four rivers and a couple of countries where you could get good gold and bdellium and onyx stones, well, right away that told God that she wasn't the *Big* Yoohwhoo, the living thing inside the earth. That told God that she was just a *part* of Yoohwhoo or a *part* of Yoohwhoo's *spirit* which separated *from* Yoohwhoo. You know? The way *part* of God or part of God's *spirit* separated from God when God divided *between* the light and *between* the darkness? After all, that's Yoohwhoo's big trick: dividing. That's how the part of God that separated from God or the part of God's spirit that separated from God's spirit *became* separate from God. [thinks] Cerebus' best guess? God told Big Yoohwhoo not to eat the bad fruit. Big Yoohwhoo then divided into Big Yoohwhoo and little yoohwhoo. Then, Big Yoohwhoo told little yoohwhoo to eat the bad fruit so Big Yoohwhoo could see what the bad fruit would do—Big Yoohwhoo figuring, as only a woman would, that as long as she didn't eat the fruit *herself* she isn't *technically* disobeying God. [thinks] Big Yoohwhoo has probably been hiding from God ever since. But God plays along, see? Just as if *the-little-yoohwhoo-who-ate-the-bad-fruit-and-decided-she-was-a-god* is actually *the-Big-Yoohwhoo-in-the-center-of-the-earth*. Because He knows that Big-Yoohwhoo-in-the-center-of-the-earth is *aware* of everything that's going on, everything that little yoohwhoo is doing and saying, everything that God is doing and saying and everything that the "sons of God" are doing and saying.

Konigsberg:
How does God know that?

Cerebus:
Because He's *God*. He knows *everything*. [thinks] Because "omniscient" is the complete opposite of "stupid".

Konigsberg:
[thinks] I mean, how do you know that Big Yoohwhoo knows everything that little yoohwhoo is doing and saying?

Cerebus:
Actually, Cerebus *doesn't* know. [thinks] It's really just Cerebus' best guess. [wanders back down to chapter eight]
Hang on. Cerebus wants to make sure he didn't skip over anything important when we skipped ahead to the part where Noah builds the altar and sacrifices the clean beasts and the clean birds. [reads for a few minutes]. Oh, right. The raven and the dove that Noah releases to see if the waters have dried up over the whole earth—or, at least, as far away as the outskirts of little yoohwhoo. See, the raven goes first. Raven. Black. "Night". "Of God". Then the dove. Dove. White. "Day." "Of Yoohwhoo". The dove comes back to Noah. The first time? When she can *"find no rest for the sole of her foot."* The second time? With an Olive leaf in her mouth. A sure sign that it's just a regional flood. You can't grow an olive tree in a matter of a few days. The third time? She's gone for good. Which, Cerebus suspects, is God trying to explain to Yoohwhoo *exactly how* their relationship is going to go. They *don't* end up together. So much for God "cleaving" to her and becoming "one flesh" with her like she keeps hoping. *"And the Yoohwhoo smelled a sauour of rest and the Yoohwhoo said in his heart, I will not againe curse the ground any more for mans sake; for the imagination of mans heart euil from his youth…neither will I againe smite any more every thing liuing, as I haue done."* See, Yoohwhoo thinks she's proved her point—that men *deserved* to be kept away from the tree of life—so that they end up dying—because she believes men are basically evil. That is—if men aren't *born* evil—they're evil from a very early age. Which is the exact *opposite* of what God believes: that men are basically good. And this becomes another recurring argument between God and Yoohwhoo. Anyway, after God's "destroy them *with* the earth" comment, the earth—Yoohwhoo—is

relieved to find out that she made it through to the end of chapter eight okay: *"As yet all the dayes of the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest and cold, and heat, and Summer, and Winter, and day and night, shall not cease."* You know, as if that's Yoohwhoo's decision to make. Nyuck nyuck nuyck. And then God explains the new rules to Noah and his sons. And, of course, when he's talking to Noah, he's also talking to Yoohwhoo and about Yoohwhoo: *"And the feare of you, & the dread of you shall be vpon euery beast of the earth, and vpon euery fowle of the aire, vpon all that moueth the earth, and vpon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they deliuered. Euery mouing thing that liueth, shalbe meat for you; euen as the greene herbe haue I giuen you all things."* Suddenly, the animals and birds are afraid of men and afraid of Yoohwhoo, whereas before the animals and birds had been completely docile, so docile that there had been no problem leading them onto the ark. That's a direct shot to Yoohwhoo's emotions. And God gives men permission to kill the animals and birds and eat them, which definitely violates the long-standing agreement between God and Yoohwhoo that the cattle are "taboo," off limits. And Yoohwhoo jumps right in immediately. Practically before God has finished talking. Angry. So angry she can't even talk straight. *"But flesh with the life thereof, the blood thereof, shall you not eate. And surely your blood of your liues will I require: at the hand of euery beast will I require it, & at the hand of man, at the hand of euery mans brother will I require the life of man."* At the hand of every beast? Even leaving aside the fact that beasts don't have hands—every beast? At the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man? Every man's brother? Every man is going to be required to kill his brother? Even for Yoohwhoo, that's more than a little crazy. Basically, as far as Cerebus can see, all she wants to say is, "I get the blood" without looking as if she's saying "I get the blood" and to indicate that she's sticking with the original terms of the deal: for every "taboo" cattle that the men kill, she's going to require the life of a man. And then she gets nasty with God, again: *"Who so sheddeth mans blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."* Basically calling God a murderer and saying that that's why man is evil and that one day man will…murder God? because God murdered men in the flood? No awareness on Yoohwhoo's part that Yoohwhoo murdered men by keeping them away from the tree of life. No awareness on Yoohwhoo's part that it was her idea to kill everything that was walking around. All God had said was that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil every day." That was God's answer to Yoohwhoo's view that everything was fine: to Yoohwhoo everything was fine because everyone was getting married and big, strong, famous guys were beating crap out of each other the way they used to in the olden days. It was *Yoohwhoo* who said that she repented of creating man and she wanted to destroy everything. All God did was to make it—regionally—come true. If Yoohwhoo considered herself to be God and men considered Yoohwhoo to be God, well, God would—up to a point—help Yoohwhoo to *be* God. He would persuade her to save Noah and his sons and their wives and a certain number of animals and birds, but apart from that? Yoohwhoo's wish is God's command. Which is why, when she calls God a murderer and tries to blame Him for men being evil, all God can say is: *"And you, be ye fruitfull, and multiply, bring foorth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein."* Basically saying, you aren't going anywhere, Yoohwhoo. You're inside the earth, and you—or part of you—has eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge-of-good-and-evil and you've also eaten of the tree of life. So, as long as the earth exists, you're going to be alive. So you just come up with every bright idea you can think of and keep dividing between the light and the light and between the light and the rocks and between the rocks and the dirt and between the dirt and the grass and between the dirt and the herbs and between the dirt and the fruit. [laughs] Feel free to discuss it amongst yourselves. And then God establishes his covenant with Noah—and gets a good shot in at Yoohwhoo at the same time. Remember Yoohwhoo saying that seedtime and harvest and cold and heat and Summer and Winter and day and night shall not cease? None of which she has had anything to do with creating? So, God picks his own "sign": the rainbow. Which is caused by light—Yoohwhoo—passing through water, neither of which are God. But God makes it sound—*"I doe set my bow in the cloud"*—as if He just came up with the rainbow—specially and on His own—as a sign between Himself and all flesh on the earth. Which makes it sound to Yoohwhoo awfully close to God implying that he created the light, which, as Cerebus said, Yoohwhoo is really sensitive about. And then the next part. The next part was the part Cerebus couldn't figure out until yesterday. [thinks] Actually there are a lot of things that Cerebus can't figure out, but this…this was the first whole episode that Cerebus couldn't figure out. You know, as opposed to "Why is it that Noah's sons are called Sem, Ham and Japheth before the flood and then Shem, Ham and Iaphet after the flood?" The 'h' disappears from Japheth's name and turns up in Shem's? It's a neat trick. But Cerebus has no idea what—if anything—it means. But the episode at the end of chapter nine. Until Cerebus saw that Shem, Ham and Iaphet were She, He and It, the episode at the end of chapter nine was driving Cerebus NUTS [clears throat]…nuts. [thinks] Anyway, as far as Cerebus can

see, it turns out to be another shot at Yoohwhoo. Basically, God is making fun of Yoohwhoo's version of the story of creation that she told in chapters two and three: *"And Noah began a husbandman and he planted a vineyard."* See, Noah represents Yoohwhoo, who said in chapter two that she planted the garden eastward in Eden. *"And he dranke of the wine, and was drunken, and hee was uncouered within his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without."* Yoohwhoo ate from the fruit of the tree of knowledge-of-good-and-evil and declared "the man and his wife were both naked and they were not ashamed," "the man and his wife," Adam and Hawwa, representing God and Yoohwhoo. Only, *this* time, God leaves *Himself* out of it—so instead of God, you have Yoohwhoo, God and "his" three sons…Shem or *She*-Yoohwhoo…Ham or *He*-Yoohwhoo…and Japhet or *It*-Yoohwhoo *"And Shem and Iaphet tooke a garment, and layed vpon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakednes of their father, and their faces backward and they saw not their fathers nakednesse."* God is making fun of She-Yoohwhoo—Hawwa—and It-Yoohwhoo—the "talking snake"—going backwards in chapter three from the "who told thee thou wast naked?" question and coming up with their "dialogue" as a cover story or a "garment"—consisting of a conversation *between them* that never actually took place—to cover Yoohwhoo's nakedness. *"And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger sonne had done to him. And he saide, Cursed Canaan: a servant of servants shall hee be vnto his brethren."* Yoohwhoo "awoke" from the effects of the bad fruit and saw what her "younger son," Adam, had "done" to her. [thinks] Of course, Adam hadn't *actually* "done" *anything* to Yoohwhoo except to say—with Yoohwhoo *prompting* him—that "the man and his wife were naked," thus implying that *Yoohwhoo* was naked. Which Yoohwhoo *was*. By *using* the *word* "naked," she was *nakedly admitting* that she had eaten the fruit she was told *not* to eat. When she recognized what Adam's use of the word "naked" actually *meant*: transparently self-exposed—she "awoke from her wine"—and promptly cursed her "grandson". See, if Yoohwhoo really was God—the Yoohwhoo God she calls herself—then her "son" would be the light and her "grandson" would be the earth. Or, if she was Adam—God's stand-in in the first story—Hawwa came out of Adam and the "talking snake" came out of Hawwa, therefore the "talking snake" was Adam's grandson. *Both* of whom Yoohwhoo ended up cursing in the first story. Of course, the fact is that *He-Yoohwhoo, She-Yoohwhoo, It Yoohwhoo and the earth* Are…All…Just…Yoohwhoo. *"And hee saide, Blessed the Yoohwhoo God of Shem, and Canaan shall be servant to them."* Here Noah becomes the mediator between God and Yoohwhoo God, the same way that he split the difference between what God told him to do and what Yoohwhoo told him to do about the animals he would take onto the ark. Ham believed in God, presumably, and Shem believed in Yoohwhoo, so, because Ham embarrassed him, Noah blesses Shem's God, Yoohwhoo, and declares that Ham's son will serve both Shem and Yoohwhoo. That is, the earth will serve She-Yoohwhoo and Yoohwhoo. Which is kind of funny. It gets even funnier when Noah says, *"God shall enlarge Iaphet and he shal dwel in the tents of Shem and Canaan shalbe his servant."* God is going to make the "talking snake" even bigger and the "Big Talking Snake" will dwell in Shem's—She-Yoohwhoo's—tent and the earth will also serve *both* of *them*. [thinks] You sure can't say that God isn't *really trying* to take all this stuff at face value, no matter how crazy it is. If Yoohwhoo says there was a talking snake, God will not only take her at her word, God will even go so far as to make the "Big Talking Snake" big enough to be one of Yoohwhoo God's sons! And the light and the earth and She-Yoohwhoo and He-Yoohwhoo's son and It-Yoohwhoo, the "big talking snake" are *ALL* going to serve Yoohwhoo God. Basically, God gives up and says, fine, we'll do it your way, we'll *ALL* do everything *YOUR way*, Yoohwhoo, and we'll see how that goes [Cerebus and I both notice Konigsberg twisting his wedding ring around and around on his finger and looking kind of unhappy]. [thinks] [sigh] What the *actual guys, the actual* Noah and Shem and Ham and Iaphet—and, particularly, *Canaan—made* of all this…*while* it was happening to them…in *real life*, [laughs] Cerebus has *no* idea. Canaan, must've been wandering around for *months* afterward going "I do NOT get this. At. ALL. *How* did I end up being everyone's *servant*?" [we all laugh] And Noah, with his hangover, going: "What in the hell was I talking about? 'God will *enlarge* Japhet?'" And then watching Japhet for the next couple of days to see if he's, you know, getting any bigger [we all laugh again]. Anyway, probably as a result of everything getting *really confusing for everyone* [thinks] for everyone *besides* God, anyway [checks the Torah] Noah ends up living twenty years longer than Adam did. So, you know: [trying to think of a good way to sum up]

Konigsberg:
[finally letting go of his wedding ring] "Good for Noah" [we all nod]

20th of Springmonth – I've finally discovered the key to unlocking all of my problems: a revolutionary approach to psychotherapy contained in a new book called *Death? I'm Sorry, I Don't Know Any Death* by Earnest Beaker. Professor Beaker's thesis is that "death is the mainspring of human activity – activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying, in some way that it is the final destiny for man." What a surge of recognition within me as I read these words! Of course! It's all so simple now! "...the fatality of death!" THAT's what has – unconsciously – bothered me about death for all these years: the *FATALITY* of it!

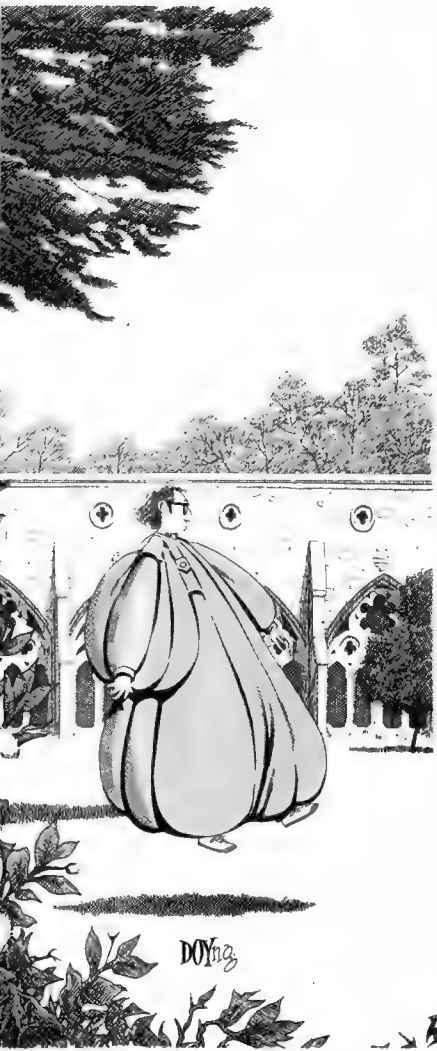
22nd of Springmonth 71 – My insights come faster and faster! *DEATH* is the reason I'm estranged from my wife! *NOT* the fact that my only interest in her had been her family's money! *DEATH* is the reason for my chronic masturbation! *NOT* shallow, infantile self-absorption in my own fatuous physical pleasures! *DEATH* is the reason that I ache with longing for subtle, barely pubescent young girls! *NOT* the firm, enticing curves of their parabolic adolescent flesh!.....Well. Okay ... the firm, enticing, curves of their parabolic adolescent flesh are DEFINITELY a "close second." But the *primary* reason is... *DEATH*!

"What we think of as man's noblest impulses – love, heroism, religion – are merely mechanisms of defence, repression and denial that allow him to live with the problems of serving two masters: physical reality and the knowledge that this must end."

"The sexual conflict is thus a universal one, because the body is a universal problem to a creature who must die." (A creature who must die! It was as if Professor Beaker was addressing, me *personally*!) *"The sexual partner does not and cannot represent a complete and lasting solution to the human dilemma. The partner represents a kind of fulfilment in freedom from self-consciousness and guilt but, at the same time, represents the negation of one's distinctive personality. We might say, the more guilt-free sex the better, but only up to a certain point."* As with all great Wisdom, it is as if I have known all my life the Truth of Professor Beaker's words – and that I needed only for him to enunciate them on the printed page to dispel – thoroughly and, indeed, completely – all of my illusions and doubts for all time! The cure for *DEATH* is guilt-free sex!

I resolve this very night to begin my pilgrimage; to seek out this Awe-Inspiring Sage; to study at his feet (or whatever part of his anatomy is responsible for the excretion of his Imperishable Wisdom). And also to get a prescription. Preferably with multiple refills.

DOYng



18th of Summermanth 75 - I return home from my pilgrimmage, disconsolate. After two years of searching, I had at last tracked Professor Beaker to his home in (of all places) Northern Ieshuria... *WESTERN* Northern Ieshuria. He had successfully concealed all clues to his national origin. In the entire 242 pages of *Death - I'm Sorry, I Don't Know Any Death* not *once* had he mentioned Five-Bar-Gate! I'll never forget that last excruciating, twenty miles to Professor Beaker's ancestral village, *DRIVING* my team of huskies to the limits of their endurance as they *STRAINED* against the weight of my dog-sled. "On Compos! On Mentis! On Schizo! On Phrenic!" "If only I had *KNOWN*," I remember thinking to myself, each jitter-step of that arduous journey... "If only I had *KNOWN* that there's no snow in Northern Ieshuria this time of year, I... I could've *WALKED* there by now!" Alas, the news was no better upon my arrival. It turned out that Professor Beaker had *DIED* the same year that his book had come out. I asked the nice woman who answered the door if the Professor had happened to leave any signed prescription-forms lying around that I could have as keepsakes for my hope chest - and she suddenly became *less* nice. Discretely, I steered the conversation around to my profound admiration for the Professor's views on the psychotherapeutic value of guilt-free sex. When that got no reaction, trying to find a way to cut my losses, I asked if she had any interest in "huskie meat." Immediately, Compos, Mentis, Schizo, Phrenic and I were arrested and formally indicted pursuant to multiple Criminal Code violations of various Northern Ieshurian statutes prohibiting Conversational Juxtapositions Tending to Cause Anxiety in Women, Children and/or Houseplants, a conviction carrying a mandatory sentence of 400 hours of listening to Social Worker Jargon. I managed to strike a deal with the Crown Prosecutor: a suspended sentence in exchange for serving as the Crown's star witness against Compos Mentis and Schizo (Phrenic having already pled guilty to the lesser charge of Being An Accessory After the Fact to an Unfortunate Euphemistic Miscarriage).

In my mailbox, I find a little over seven hundred while you were out notes advising me that Cerebus is ready to dictate his commentaries on the next part of the first Book of Moshe we were in. I'm ready. Fearing the worst, I race to my bedroom. To my relief, I find the wax seal on my nightstand drawer unbroken, the "chastity padlock" secure.

SLEEPERS
Figured it must be a clothes thing.
You know, those...huggly, snuggly...bag-shaped outfits that babies wear.
Is that what they're called?
Squeezing
Actually Cerebus isn't interested in any of this
That's exactly what she said.
First Book of Moshe. Chapter ten
Right. Yes. Chapter ten. I'm all ears.

Cerebus

Okay. Chapter ten. The generations of Shem, Ham and Japhet. *Yoohwhoo's* version, anyway. You can tell that it's Yoohwhoo's version because she narrates it as if it's going to be the same as chapter six: a bunch of big, strong, famous guys beating crap out of each other. Ham's eldest son is Cush. *"And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Yoohwhoo: wherefore it is saide, Even as Nimrod the mighte hunter before the Yoohwhoo. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Ereck, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Out of that land went forth Ayshur, and builded Nineueh, and the citie Rehoboth, and Calah, and Reuen betweene Nineueh and Calah: the same is a great citie."* Unfortunately for Yoohwhoo, that's about it, as far as the "mighty hunters before the Yoohwhoo" and the "great cities" go. Shem's son, Arphaxad begets Salah? Nothing. Salah begets Eber? Nothing. Then Eber begets two sons and Yoohwhoo tells us *"the name of one Peleg, for in his dayes was the earth diuided, and his brothers name Joktan."* So, evidently, this Peleg guy's name translates as something like: "Divided Earth." Which is interesting, since Yoohwhoo is, obviously, talking about herself. But, as usual, she doesn't say *much*—besides the basic fact that the earth was divided in the days of Peleg. The only other clue is in the last verse, *"These the families of the sonnes of Noah after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations diuided in the earth after the Flood."* Note

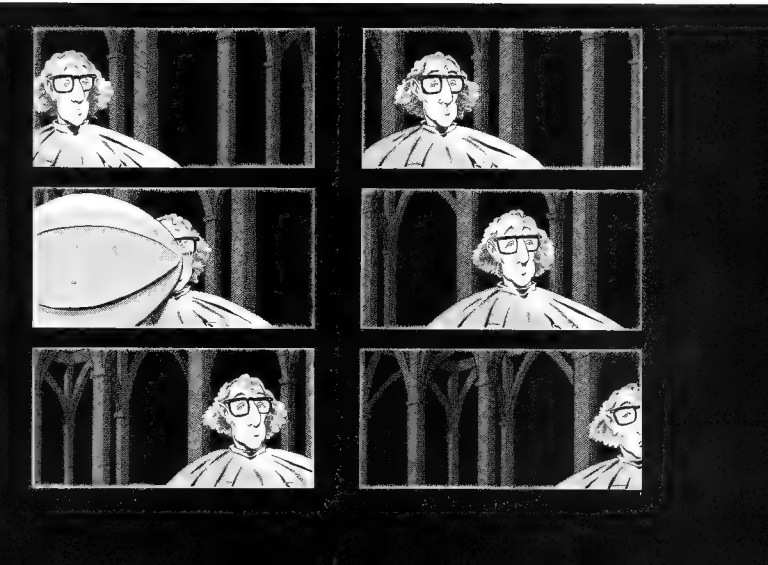
Konigsberg

" *in* the earth." I *promise* to *always note* "*in* the earth" if you promise to stop pointing it out.

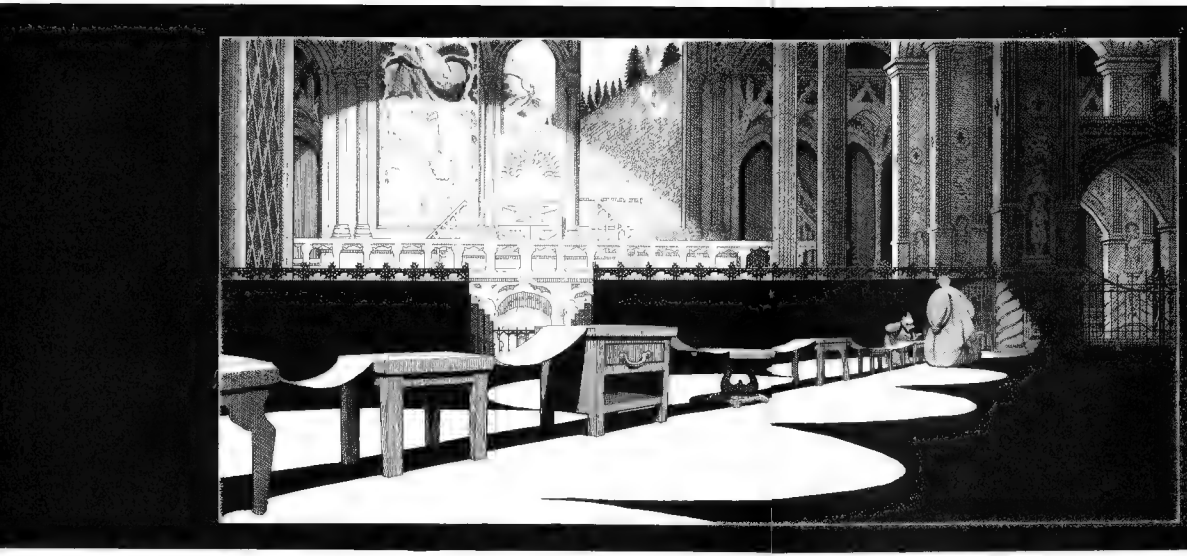
Cerebus.

[thinks] Deal. As Cerebus reads it, this means that not only are the spirits of *birds flying around* upside-down inside the earth, not only are the spirits of *men and women walking around* upside down inside the earth, but *nations also* have spirits—BIG spirits—inside the earth. And all of those nations formed *around* the descendants of Shem, Ham and Japhet. Which makes for a big difference between the two different kinds of men. The *regular* men & the *leftover* men from last time & end up getting absorbed into whatever nation formed around whatever Shem, Ham or Japhet descendant they happened to be living near. The *regular* men have sons, the sons grow up and "beget" other sons, but they're just, you know, *regular* families. The descendants of Shem, Ham and Japhet, on the other hand, although *they're* families, too, they're *also* nations. Canaan begets Tzidon and Heth, but he *also* begets the Jebusite, the Emorite, the Girgasite and so on: *nationalities*. So basically, while these *nations* are forming *on* the earth around the descendants of Shem, Ham and Japhet, they're also forming *in* the earth as BIG spirits. BIG spirits that aren't as big as Yoohwhoo but which are much bigger than bird-spirits and men-spirits and women-spirits. And they are *all* descended from He, She and It, so *everyone* is under Yoohwhoo. God has no representation at all.

Okay. Now, chapter eleven. Cerebus is pretty sure that this is the story of "how the earth was divided" in Peleg's days. *"And the whole earth was of one lippe, and of one words."* All the descendants of Shem, Ham and Japhet still speak the same language. *"And they said, Goe to, let vs build vs a city and a tower, whose top may vnto heauen, and let us make vs a name, lest we be scattered abroad vpon the face of the whole earth. And the Yoohwhoo came downe to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the Yoohwhoo said, Behold the people one, and they all one language, and this they begin to doe: and now nothing will be restrained from them which they haue imagined to doe. Goe to let vs go downe, and there confound their language, that they may not vnderstand one anothers speech."* This is Yoohwhoo deciding, again—same as she did with the fruit from the tree of life—what things men are going to be allowed to do and have and what things they are *not* going to be allowed to do and have. It's a weird part of the book. It's as if the men believe—and *Yoohwhoo* believes—that "heaven" is something more than a bunch of air, dividing the waters from the waters, as if "heaven" is [laughs] Yoohwhoo's *house*, or something. This is also the first time that we find out that Yoohwhoo's spirit isn't *confined* to the earth, that her spirit can move around in the air—in the "heaven"—as well as in the earth.



[thinks] [tells me to put this part in brackets] [Although you could say that that was what chapter three verse eight meant: *"And they heard the voice of the Yoohwhoo God, walking in the garden in the wind of the day."*] Obviously, Yoohwhoo doesn't like the idea of sharing "heaven" with *anyone* but the *birds* [thinks] It's *also* possible that Yoohwhoo only *thinks* she can move around in the air Since there's an "upside down" spirit-version of *everyone* and every *thing* flying or walking or hopping or crawling around *inside the* earth, it's possible that Yoohwhoo just *thinks* she's looking "down" from "heaven," when she's actually in the center of the earth looking "up" at all these upside-down spirit-creatures Watching all of these children of men [pauses] erecting…[pauses] [clears throat] ..erecting .and, uh, climbing up. .this, uh…big, long.. *hard* ..uh ..tower, which is, uh, getting bigger and bigger and [clears throat] which is allowing the *spirits* of these children of men to climb deeper and, uh, [clears throat] deeper *into* Yoohwhoo and, uh…Anyway, she's basically telling God that this tower thing is a bad idea and that the men's language should be "confounded" so they can't understand each other [thinks] and so they'll knock it the hell off. Since men are still calling on the Yoohwhoo, Yoohwhoo's wish is God's command [reading] And then, at the end of the chapter, God does His Own "generations of Shem," basically forgetting about Ham and Japhet and concentrating on Noah's "first born". There's nothing really *new* in the "generations of Shem". It's the same as chapter five's "generations of Adam" The men continue to live shorter and shorter lives Unlike *Yoohwhoo's* generations in chapter *ten*, in chapter *eleven*, God is only interested in the "first-born" son. *Apart* from the "first-born" son—same as He did in chapter *five*—God just mentions that each guy *"begate sonnes and daughters"*. At some point, Yoohwhoo finally understands that the argument which has been going on *around* her since chapter one—is about who is the eldest and who is the youngest Who is the "morning" and who is the "evening." Who is the "day" and who is the "night" Who is God and who is God's—not-really-but-for-the-sake-of-keeping-the-argument-simple-and-in-tune-with-Yoohwhoo's-misunderstanding-so-Yoohwhoo-will-pay-attention—[Komigsberg twists his wedding ring so hard he winces] "first born" So, Yoohwhoo starts paying attention, waiting for something to happen in the "generations of Shem" that will explain what the heck has been going on and that fits what she believes is going on. See, Yoohwhoo has plenty of bright ideas she got from the bad fruit about who she is and about who God is, so she's just waiting to see something happen that matches her bright ideas And what happens is this guy named Terah, see, who begat Abram, Nahor and Haran. Three sons—*all* of whom get mentioned, this time, not just the "first born," so, as far as Yoohwhoo knows, this could be the new "Cain, Hebel and Sheth" or the new "Shem, Ham and Japhet". And, boy are they interesting! Haran dies before his father, Terah, which hasn't happened a son dying *before* his father does—since Hebel died before Adam! And Nahor marries Haran's daughter! A guy marrying his own niece! And—as we find out later in chapter twenty—Abram is married to his half-sister, Sarai! They have the same father, but different mothers! All *right*, thinks Yoohwhoo, *finally* we're getting to the bottom of this! This "God" and I have different *Mother* Gods, but the same *Father* God. Or "God's" *Father* God died and I'm actually "God's" *Uncle* God! Or *my* Father God died and I'm actually God's Niece God! [thinks] From what Cerebus knows about tribes, Cerebus is pretty sure that Terah and Abram and Sarai and Nahor and Milcah and Lot were, you know, "asked to leave" by their tribes. Which only makes sense After all, here's all these guys who are supposed to be "sons of God" and—in one generation!—*one* of them marries his half-sister and the *other* one marries his dead brother's daughter! Which explains a *lot*, from Yoohwhoo's standpoint, when she sees them expelled from their tribe. "God" is ashamed because *marrying ME—his half-brother or his half-sister or his uncle or his niece or…WHOEVER I am… is really, really evil!* Just like Yoohwhoo had been saying all along: "man is evil from his youth"! Just like God! "For in the image of God made he man"! So, Yoohwhoo decides that Abram is the horse she's going to bet on, Yoohwhoo's own personal representative in the story, Yoohwhoo's own hand-picked Adam or Yoohwhoo's own hand-picked Noah, the key to figuring out what's going on So, in chapter twelve? She tells Abram to *"Get thee out of thy countrey, and from thy kinred, and from thy fathers house, vnto a land that I will shew thee."* Three guesses what the land is



Cerebus.

Yoohwhoo's Garden! The garden eastward of Eden. [thinks] Cerebus thought that would have been obvious. The *first* Adam didn't work out, but *this* Adam, hand-picked by Yoohwhoo, *this* one, she thinks, *is* going to work out. *"And I will make of thee a great nation, and I wil blesse thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt bee a blessing. And I will blesse them that blesse thee and curse him, that curseth thee: and in thee shal all families of the earth be blessed."* Bless THEM that bless thee. Curse HIM that curseth thee. To Yoohwhoo, it's going to be Yoohwhoo and Abram and all the he, she and its—all the "families of the earth"—against God. Yoohwhoo assumes that God will *curse* Abram because Yoohwhoo has picked him. In verses seven and eight, Abram builds an altar to the Yoohwhoo and calls upon the name of the Yoohwhoo. For Yoohwhoo? So far so good. The Garden being back in the story leads to a "cherubim with the flaming sword" reminder: *"Therefore it shall come to passe, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive."* The Egyptians are like the "cherubim with the flaming sword," like Yoohwhoo herself: killing "outsider" men but saving women. Sarai turns out to be quite a... [thinks] character. Happy to pretend to be Abram's sister even to the point of [clears throat] "going with" Pharaoh and with Abimelech, the King of Gerar. Cerebus is willing to bet that the Pharaoh and Abimelech episodes *actually* took place one night after the other and that Yoohwhoo, when she saw how that *looked*—like Sarai was this real tramp—had some Yoohwhoo-worshipper change them around so the Abimelech story doesn't come until chapter twenty.

Konigsberg

How do you know the Abimelech story doesn't *belong* in chapter twenty?

Cerebus

By chapter twenty Sarai is *ninety-nine years old*. If *you* were the King of Gerar do *you* think you would get the "hots" for a ninety nine-year-old woman?

Konigsberg

I see what you mean.

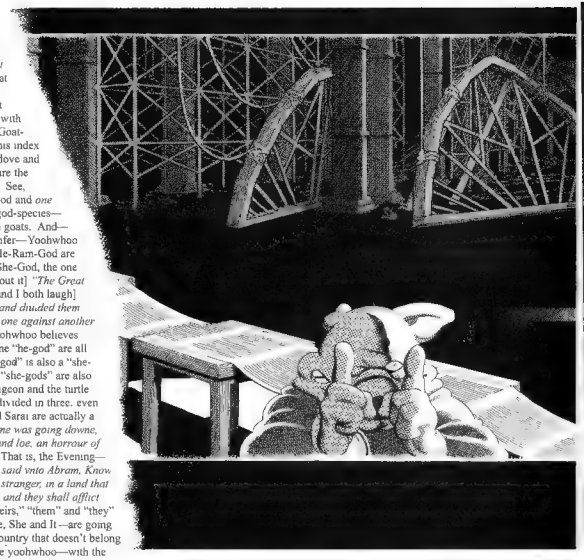
Cerebus.

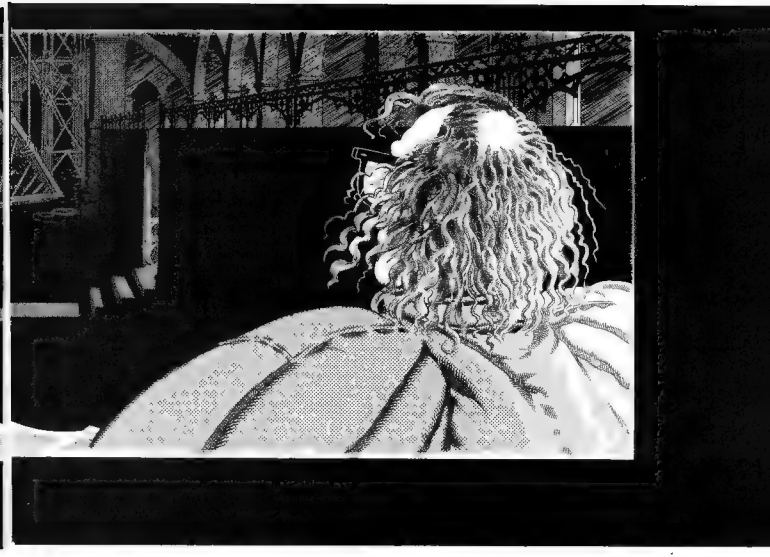
Of course, Yoohwhoo thinks she's *God* and that Abram represents *her*, so she's not paying a lot of *attention* to Sarai. Which—if she *really* wanted to know what the heck was going on—she should have. As Abimelech says to Sarah when he gives her back to Abraham: *"Behold! I have given thy brother a thousand of silver: behold, he to thee a couering of the eyes unto all that are with thee, and with all."* That is, Abram is *such* a nice guy, everyone—the he, she and its that Sarai/Yoohwhoo is "fronting" for that is, the "all" that are "with her" and even God—consciously *ignore* what a lousy *tramp* Sarai is, because they like Abram. When Cerebus first read it, Cerebus thought that Abram wasn't so much a *nice* guy as a really *weird* guy. What sort of husband just... *stands there*... while Pharaoh and, later, Abimelech decide to make "hoochie-coochie" with his wife? And when the *truth* comes *out*—in *Pharaoh's* case because Yoohwhoo sends plagues against his house (for almost messing up her nicely matched evil set of married step-siblings) and in *Abimelech's* case because God comes to him in a dream—what sort of husband would accept flocks of cattle and men-servants and maid-servants as a bribe to take his slutty wife and go away? And then, Cerebus realized that Abram and Sarai are *He*-Yoohwhoo and *She*-Yoohwhoo. The "She" part of Yoohwhoo, as she keeps insisting, just wants to be reunited with God, to be "one flesh" with God, because God is like a Pharaoh, like a King. What God is saying through Abram is that God isn't fooled, that God *knows* that the *real* reason that He-Yoohwhoo, Abram, is willing to give She Yoohwhoo, Sarai, to God/Pharaoh/Abimelech is to get *lots of cattle*—whose blood Yoohwhoo wants to *drink*... and men-servants... to get the blood *out* of the cattle by *mutilating* them and spilling the blood all over the ground so Yoohwhoo can drink it – and maid-servants—to breed more men-servants to keep the whole operation going. As far as Yoohwhoo is concerned, she figures she can't lose with this plan. She believes men are evil. Obviously, if Abram mutilates all of the cattle to feed Yoohwhoo, then Abram is *evil* and God will have to *destroy* Abram or, at least, *curse* Abram, proving Yoohwhoo's point. [reading] Okay. So...

At that point, Abram and Sarai and Lot come out of Egypt and Abram and Lot both have everything they could possibly want in abundance. *"And the land was not able to beare them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great so that they could not dwell together. And there was a strife betweene the heardmen of Abrams cattell, and the heardmen of Lots cattell. And Abram said vnto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee between mee and thee, and between my heardmen and thy heardmen: for wee bee men brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thy selfe, I pray thee, from mee: if thou the left hand, then I will goe to the right: or if thou to the right hand, then I will goe to the left."* This is one hell of a surprise for Yoohwhoo. God is saying, I know what you're up to, but let's not fight about it. You go your way and I'll go my way. Now Yoohwhoo doesn't know *what* to do. God has a point. *Both* Abram and Lot are descended from He, She and It, *both* Abram and Lot believe in Yoohwhoo God, *both* Abram and Lot are lousy with cattle—cattle that they're more than eager to mutilate to feed Yoohwhoo God. What does it matter to Yoohwhoo God if Abram and Lot are mutilating cattle *together* or *separately*? Yoohwhoo God smells a rat, but she doesn't know where, so all she can do is go along with it. Once again, Yoohwhoo separates from God. So after Lot leaves, Yoohwhoo gives Abram a guided tour of the garden, obviously wondering the whole time what in the heck God is up to. Chapter fourteen, the war between the *five* kings and the *four* kings, doesn't help Yoohwhoo a bit. See, the four kings represent Yoohwhoo God, He-Yoohwhoo, She-Yoohwhoo and It-Yoohwhoo. The five kings represent God, Yoohwhoo God, He-Yoohwhoo, She-Yoohwhoo and It-Yoohwhoo. What God is saying is that when God *is united with* Yoohwhoo and her three aspects, he will always defeat Yoohwhoo and her three aspects trying to "*go it alone*". Which is why it doesn't bother God either being *with* Yoohwhoo or *apart from* Yoohwhoo. "Heads God wins, tails Yoohwhoo loses." To amplify the point, Abram comes to the rescue of his nephew, Lot. Not only saves Lot but saves everyone *with* Lot as God intends, ultimately, to save Yoohwhoo and everyone who is with Yoohwhoo.

To celebrate, God brings another King into the story, Melchizedek, the Priest of the most high God, *"And hee blessed him and said, Blessed bee Abram of the most high God, possessour of heauen and earth: and blessed bee the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. and he gaue him tithes of all."* Yoohwhoo must've been just *fuming*. Not only doesn't God *destroy* Abram or *curse* him. He *blesses* him! And blesses him as the *possessor* of heaven...*and earth*! God is declaring Abram the possessor of Yoohwhoo! And then Melchizedek blesses God for delivering Abram's enemies. Yoohwhoo, He Yoohwhoo, She Yoohwhoo and It Yoohwhoo—into Abram's hand! Furious, Yoohwhoo speaks through the King of Sodom: *"And the King of Sodome said vnto Abram, giue me the soules and take the goods to thy selfe."* Basically, saying that Abram is greedy enough to trade his people for material goods—sort of what he did with Sarai. *"And Abram said to the King of Sodome, I haue lift up mi hand vnto the Yoohwhoo the most high God, the possessour of heauen and earth, that I will not take from a thread euen to a shoe latchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say: I haue made Abram rich."* Which shows a lot of *chutzpah* on Abram's part, since that's exactly how he got rich in the first place. *"...saue onely that which the yong men haue eaten, and the portion of the men which went with mee, Aner, Eschol, and Mamre: let them take their portion."* Which is, you know, a nice recovery by Yoohwhoo, because Abram—in his moment of triumph, where he has been declared by God to be the possessor of heaven and earth—Abram declares *Yoohwhoo* to be the most high God *and* the possessor of heaven and earth.

Which, in chapter fifteen, really causes major problems when Yoohwhoo decides to take advantage of her new status. She promises Abram that he'll have an heir. *"And he brought him forth abroad, and said: Looke now towards heauen, and tell the starres, if thou be able to number them. And he said vnto him: So shall thy seed be."* So, Yoohwhoo is definitely marking Abram as being "of the light," "of Yoohwhoo." *"And he said vnto him: Take me a heifer of three yeeres old, and a shee goat of three yeeres old, and a [illegible]*





rumme of three veeres old, and a turtle dowe, and a yong pigeon." Okay, so here's Yoohwhoo's *latest* bright idea. Yoohwhoo figures that there are *two* She-Gods and one *He*-God and two small beings that don't count for much. [gesturing with his arms, wide] Heifer-God, She-Goat-God and He-Ram-God. [holding his index fingers a few inches apart] turtle dove and young pigeon. Sarai and Abram are the turtle dove and the young pigeon. See, Yoohwhoo believes that the He-God and *one* of the She-Gods are of the same god-species—like a ram and a she-goat are both goats. And—just as goats are smaller than a heifer—Yoohwhoo believes that She-Goat-God and He-Ram-God are both smaller gods than the other She-God, the one Yoohwhoo thinks of as [thinks about it] *"The Great Heifer in Heaven."* [Konigsberg and I both laugh] *"And he tooke vnto him all these and diuided them in the midst, and layd each peece one against another but the birds diuided he not."* Yoohwhoo believes that the two "she-gods" and the one "he-god" are all divided in three. That is, the "he-god" is also a "she-god" and an "it-god" and the two "she-gods" are also "he-gods" and "it gods" but the pigeon and the turtle dove—Abram and Sarai *–aren't* divided in three. even Yoohwhoo admits that Abram and Sarai are actually a he and a she. *"And when the Sunne was going downe, a deepe sleepe fell vpon Abram. and loe. an horrour of great darkenesse fell vpon him."* That is, the Evening—God—comes to Abram *"And he said vnto Abram, Know of a surety, that thy seed shalbe a stranger, in a land that is not theirs, and shal serue them, and they shall afflict them foure hundred yeeres."* "Theirs," "them" and "they" and "them". Yoohwhoo God—He, She and It—are going to take Abram's seed to another country that doesn't belong to them. That is, the regional little yoohwhoo—with the garden—is going to take Abram's seed into a country Egypt—with a much bigger Yoohwhoo [thinks] probably the bigger Yoohwhoo that the little regional yoohwhoo originally separated from. the Yoohwhoo that the little regional yoohwhoo believes to be the Big Heifer in Heaven. *"And also that nation whom they shall serue wil I iudge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt goe to thy fathers in peuce; thou shalt be buried in a good old age."* Basically, God is just establishing that he knows what Yoohwhoo is up to and is telling her that it won't work—that Abram and his seed will prove stronger, ultimately, than the bigger Yoohwhoo in Egypt. It'll take four hundred years to play out, but the bigger Yoohwhoo in Egypt will neither destroy Abram and his seed, nor will she absorb Abram and his seed and God won't curse Abram or destroy Abram. Abram will die a natural death [thinks] You'd figure that Yoohwhoo would spare herself the four hundred *plus* years of futility, but, remember Yoohwhoo is a woman so she'll never pay attention to what she's told, she has to see for herself. Besides, God holds out a little hope to her. *"But in the fourth generation they shall come hither againe: for the iniquitie of the Amorites is not yet full."* [thinks] Doesn't bother her for a moment that God is more than four hundred years ahead of her, telling her that her plan won't work. This is one single-minded bitch. *"And it came to passe that when the Sunne went downe, and it was, behold, a smoking furnace, and a lampe of fire that passed betweene those pieces."* The lamp of fire, of course, is Yoohwhoo declaring that *she* is the She-Goat-God, *she* is the He-Ram-God *and she* is the Great He-fer in Heaven. *"In that same day the Yoohwhoo made a couenant with Abram, saying, Vnto thy seed haue I giuen this land from the riuer of Egypt vnto the great riuer, the riuer Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizites, and the Kadmonites. And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Iebusites."* Ten nations under Abram's seed's command which, presumably, will make Abram's seed the largest collective spirit in the earth, next to Yoohwhoo herself. Okay. And then in chapter sixteen, Sarai has no children. Sarai *wants* children so she has Abram go in unto her Egyptian handmaid, Hagar. God indicates to Yoohwhoo that, again, He isn't fooled. Sarai represents the Big Yoohwhoo in the earth. Although she is pretending that the bigger Yoohwhoo in Egypt is Yoohwhoo, the Big Herself, the Great Heifer in Heaven, God is indicating through Hagar that, again, he isn't fooled, that God is fully aware that the Yoohwhoo in Egypt is just the *Big* Yoohwhoo's handmaid, the same as the *little* yoohwhoo—who grew the garden and ate the bad fruit and decided she was a god—was *Egypt's* handmaid.

And God indicates what the result of Abram's seed going into Egypt is going to be. *"And he went in vnto Hagar, and she conceiued. And when shee saw that shee had conceiued, her mistresse was despised in her eyes."* Abram's seed will go into Egypt, stay there four hundred years, one of his seed will impregnate an Egyptian woman but that will only cause the Egyptian woman and Egypt *herself*—to despise Yoohwhoo. Sarai Yoohwhoo's reaction is typical. *"And Sarai said vnto Abram, My wrong be vpon thee: I haue giuen my maid into thy bosome, and when shee saw that she had conceiued, I was despised in her eyes: the Yoohwhoo iudge between me and thee."* In other words, "this was my idea, but it didn't work out so it's your fault. Just ask Yoohwhoo." *"But Abram said vnto Sarai: Behold thy maid in thy hand, doe to her that which is good in thine eyes."* God says, "What are you dragging Me into this for? These are all your ideas. Do what you think is right, Yoohwhoo." *"And when Sarai afflicted her she fled from her face."* Well, exactly. Any time anyone doesn't do exactly what Yoohwhoo wants, she gets rid of them. Now, even if they do *exactly* what Yoohwhoo wants, if it doesn't turn out the way Yoohwhoo *wants* it to, she gets rid of them. Of course, Yoohwhoo doesn't have to think about it for very long before she realizes how stupid she's being. Egypt is *her* big idea. It's Yoohwhoo's idea that Egypt is going to absorb Abram and his seed. And now Sarai just pounded on "Egypt" and told her to take a hike. So Yoohwhoo has to divide again, this time separating into an *Angel* of Yoohwhoo who goes after Hagar. *"And he said Hagar Sarais maid whence camest thou? And whither wilt thou goe? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistresse Sarai."* Oops for Yoohwhoo. This is exactly what Cain said, *"Behold, thou hast driuen me out this day from the face of the earth, and from thy face shall I be hid."* Even for someone as monumentally stupid as Yoohwhoo, it has to start sinking in that she has a certain problem in these areas. *And the Angel of the Yoohwhoo said vnto her: Returne to thy mistresse, and submit thy selfe vnder her hands."* Heh-heh. You can just imagine what Hagar thought of *that* plan. *"And the Angel of the Yoohwhoo said vnto her, I will multiply thy seede exceedingly, that it shall not be numbred for multitude."* Back to "square one" with Yoohwhoo believing that women have a "seed" instead of just being the "boxes" the "seeds" grow in. *"And the Angel of the Yoohwhoo said vnto her: Behold, thou art with child, and shalt beare a sonne, and shalt call his name Ishmael: because the Yoohwhoo hath heard thine affliction."* Of course, the name "Ishmael" translates as "God shall hear". God shall *hear*, all right. God shall *hear* that Yoohwhoo is taking credit for women getting pregnant again. God shall hear that Yoohwhoo is back talking about women having a "seed" the same as the men do. Which, of course, leads to evil multiplying in the earth, the earth being filled with violence, giants in the earth whose only thought is evil every day, etcetera. So, God tries to point this out—that Ishamael *"... will be a wilde man; his hand will be against euery man, and euery man's hand against him & he shal dwell in the presence of all his brethren."* That is, raised to believe that he's actually a *woman's* seed, he'll be just another big, strong, famous guy beating crap out of people, like Nimrod. Until the women give up the idea that they *have* a seed, there'll be no getting rid of the big, strong famous guys beating crap out of people. Meanwhile, Hagar *"... called the name of the Yoohwhoo that spake vnto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Haue I also here looked after him that seeth me?"* Yoohwhoo thinks she's God, Hagar thinks Yoohwhoo's angel is a god and that Hagar is looking after—that is, pregnant with—a god. So, all in all, *another* giant step backward to "square one" where Hawwa believed that she had "gotten a man from the Yoohwhoo" when Cain was born [sighs]. *"Wherefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi."* That is, "the well of him that liveth and seeth me". This is pretty typical, too. The "god" speaks to Hagar when she's next to a well, so Hagar decides that that must be where the "god" is, inside the well. Considering that water is as stupid as fruit, as stupid as air and only a little less stupid than cattle, she's not too far wrong. Speaking of "only a little less stupid than cattle," Yoohwhoo kicks off chapter seventeen by calling herself almighty God. *"And when Abram was ninetie veres old and nine the Yoohwhoo appeared to Abram and said vnto him, I am the almightie God: walke before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my couenant betweene me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face."* At which point, the *actual* God—having decided that enough is enough with all of these phony yoohwhoo "gods" and "women's seed" crap—decides to speak to Abram on His own behalf. *"and God talked with him, saying: As for me, behold, my couenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of a multitude of nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall bee Abraham: for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitfull, and I will make nations of thee, and Kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my couenant betweene me and thee, and thy seede after thee, in their generations for an euerlasting couenant, to bee a God vnto thee, and to thy seede after thee. And I will giue vnto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land of thy sojournings wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an euerlasting possession, and I will be their God. And God said vnto Abraham, Thou shalt keepe my couenant therefore, thou, and thy seede after thee, in their generations. This is my couenant which yee shall keepe betweene me and you, and thy seed after thee: euery man-child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskinne, and it shal be a token of the couenant betwixt me and you. And he that is a sonne of eight daves shalbe circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is borne in thy house, or bought with money of any stranger which is not of thy seed. He that is borne in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my couenant shall be in your flesh, for an euerlasting couenant. And the circumcised man-child, whose flesh of his foreskinne is not circumcised, that soule shall be cut off from his people: hee hath broken my couenant. And God said vnto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah her name. And I will blesse her, and giue thee a sonne also of her: yea I will bresse her, and she shall become nations, Kings of people shall be of her. Then Abraham fell vpon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall be borne vnto him that is an hundred veeres old? And shal Sarah that is ninetie yeeres old, beare?"* That's a weird part of the story. It wasn't unusual for a guy who was eighty-six to have a son

But it is *funny* for a guy who is a *hundred* to have a son? The difference between Hagar and Sarai? Well, obviously, if you want to grow a seed, you need a young box to grow it in. But, what's the difference between eighty-six and a hundred for getting the seed into the box? *And Ibrahim said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee! And God said, Sarah thy wife shalt bearе thee a sonne indeede, and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, with his seed after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: behold I have blessed him, and will make him fruitfull, and will multiplie him exceedingly: twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bearе unto thee at this set time, in the next yeere. And he left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham."* Which God would, you know, actually *do*—because God actually is "up," above the "heaven" in the black nosebleed waters of space. So, there you have it. God's longest speech since the first chapter. His first covenant since the rainbow. Yoohwhoo must not have known what hit her. God just made a covenant with *her guy!* With the He, She and It guy! The evil guy who married his half-sister! And he just changed their names! It shouldn't have come as *that* big a surprise. God had just been waiting for Yoohwhoo to actually *say out loud*, "I am almighty God." From the time that Hagar implied that she believed the angel of Yoohwhoo was a "god" and that she, Hagar, was *pregnant* with a "god" it was only a matter of time before Yoohwhoo decided she was almighty God, again. It took thirteen years for Yoohwhoo to say it out *loud*, but God knew it was coming [snickers] [tries to contain himself] [snickers again]

Konigsberg
[snickering a bit himself] What?

Cerebus
[snickering, waving him away]

Konigsberg
[laughing] No, come on. I could use a good laugh. Spill it.

Cerebus
The circumcision. [laughing]

Konigsberg
[glancing down at his own crotch] What about the circumcision?

Cerebus
[suddenly using a deep, deep voice that sounds like that of a big, big boss of some kind] "Yoohwhoo? .Yoohwhoo? Do you remember...?" [mimes puffing on a cigar.] ". .Do you remember, Yoohwhoo, back when ..uh.. when the deep sleep fell upon Adam? And ..and.. I, uh.. I, uh.. took out one of his ribs?" [puffs on his cigar. Konigsberg and I both laugh as we realize that Cerebus is doing an "impression" of God] "You *remember* that, Yoohwhoo? Remember how it was like this.. this.. uhhh.. " [pretends to search for the right word] " . *.symbol*.. of, uh.. of our *relationship*? A *..symbol*.. of how you were like...*Bone* of my Bones"
Like.. like a *Bone* close to my *heart*? Like a *rib*, Yoohwhoo?" [puffs on his cigar] "Well, uh ..*actually*.. Yoohwhoo." [grinning, puffing on his cigar] "Actually, Yoohwhoo ..*our* relationship ..*our* ..relationship is, uh.. it's *actually*, uh.. it's actually a little.. *..south* ..of there, Yoohwhoo." [we're all snickering. Cerebus grinning. Puffing on his cigar] "See.. you weren't *really* like one of my *..ribs*.." [I'm laughing so hard I can't see what I'm writing through the tears] "See, Yoohwhoo? It's more like.." [puffs on his cigar] "It's more like you were this.. this.. useless piece of flesh" [puffs on his cigar] "that I.. that I *snipped off the end of my* dick." [we all laugh uproariously]
[after we're all done laughing] [which takes a while] That's what Cerebus figures God is saying. Yoohwhoo doesn't "get it" for more than four hundred years, but when she does [laughs] boy, is she pissed! But, more importantly, the circumcision is a way of getting rid of Yoohwhoo's "woman's seed" bullshit. Because the women ... to be circumcised.. they're just, you know, *women*.. they aren't part of God's covenant. So, now it's God and the circumcised men against Yoohwhoo and whatever crazy idea she comes up with next to try to get the circumcised men in trouble.

Konigsberg
Actually, from what I understand, there are a number of places in *Africa* where *girls* are circumcised

Cerebus
That doesn't surprise Cerebus. It doesn't *accomplish* anything [thinks] but, knowing Yoohwhoo? That doesn't surprise Cerebus one bit. There isn't anything too low or too cruel that Yoohwhoo won't give it a try. Circumcising someone who hasn't got a dick or a foreskin? [wincing] That's just plain sick. [sighs] But, then, that's Yoohwhoo

essay

Islam, My Islam

Before beginning this final instalment of "Islam, My Islam," there are a couple of corrections and then a few overall observations that I'd like to make:

First, God is not *mentioned in the Constitution of the United States of America. He* is *mentioned in the Declaration of Independence. So, the document which declares the independence of the United States from the British crown acknowledges the sovereignty of God, but the document which establishes the United States as a nation* doesn't *acknowledge the sovereignty of God. By contrast, the Canadian constitution—which was repatriated from Britain in 1982—maintains the sovereignty of the British crown in Canada, but also acknowledges God's sovereignty over...whatever it is we're supposed to be now...Her Majesty's Once and Future Dominion and/or Quasi-Independent, Quasi-Nation-State of Canada? Something like that. As convoluted as the latter state of existence may appear, I still, personally, prefer living in a country whose foundational document acknowledges God's sovereignty believing (as I do) that the "first pillar of Islam" applies just as much—if not more—to* nations *as it does to* individuals.

Secondly, it turns out that Turkey is not *a member of the European Union. Turkey is a member of NATO and has applied for membership in the European Union. You might remember in a previous instalment that I had questioned whether the European Union was consulting with Turkey on the manner in which that country had successfully managed the "separation of mosque and state"—the only Middle Eastern Muslim state to have done so—under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Turkey's president from 1923 to 1938 who took the remains of the Ottoman empire—the remains of the caliphate which began with Abu Bakr in 632—and formed it into a modern, secular state). It turns out that the opposite may be the case: evidently, one of the conditions which the EU is demanding as a precondition for Turkey's admission is a relaxation of Turkey's laws limiting free speech. If this refers to Turkey's success in suppressing religious groups from taking a politically active role in the government and its disestablishment of Islam as the state religion, it would probably go a long way towards explaining how, in 1997, there was a brief experiment with Islamist leadership in Turkey which was "eased out" in a behind-the-scenes "soft coup" perpetrated by the army. If membership in the EU is viewed by a majority of Turks as a big enough international "carrot" (and—as inexplicable as it may be to me—it* does *seem that the nations of the continent do view membership in the EU as a very big "carrot," indeed) it's not hard to imagine popular Turkish sentiment leaning towards the accommodation of a Brussels-style political "homogenization"—absolute freedom of expression and absolute freedom of religion—with the resulting (practically guaranteed, I think) transformation of Turkey from a secular, modern state into a Muslim/EU dictatorship. The EU is also demanding that the Kurdish language be used in education and broadcasting and is insisting on the abolition of the death penalty—a move that, reportedly, may save the life of Abdullah Ocalan, the jailed Kurdish separatist leader. The Kurds, of course, are largely nomadic Muslims inhabiting much of north-eastern Iraq, north-western Iran and south-eastern Turkey. Why the great democracies of Europe are hell-bent on such a course is a great mystery to me, unless they have fallen prey to the simplistic view that the Kurds—having been the victims of Saddam Hussein's chemical weapons in the Kurdish territories of Iraq—are somehow (under the terms of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend") potential allies of the Western Democracies. Whatever else largely nomadic Muslims might be, describing them as potential allies of Western Democracies is a bit of a stretch, to say the least, in my view. Where no firmly entrenched modern, secular governmental structure exists, certainly: one selects the least offensive of a bad lot (as was the case in Afghanistan with the Northern Alliance). But, to "switch horses in mid-stream," advancing the cause of tribal Muslims at the expense of or in tandem with an entrenched modern, secular structure (in the name, presumably, of misguided left-liberal, quasi-socialist "even-handedness") seems to me a recipe for disaster. As the* National Post *editorialized about the likely net effect of any sort of Islamist government coming to power in Ankara ("Why Turkey matters"* 11 July*) "Such a transformation would be nothing less than a catastrophe for the*

Western world. On the political front, the development of the Muslim world would be set back by decades—for the minority of Muslim scholars who argue for the separation of mosque and state would have lost their guiding star. The result would be a military disaster, too: The alliance between Israel and Turkey, two of the region's military superpowers, is a stabilizing influence in the Middle East. Should an Islamist government in Ankara renounce Turkey's alliance with Israel, all bets might be off." As it is, the present Turkish government under Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit seems tailor-made for the EU. The improbable, pan-political-spectrum coalition of Ecevit's own Democratic Left Party, the centre-right Motherland party and the far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) is now fragmenting in the aftermath of a series of mysterious ailments which have left the Prime Minister unable to work and which cause him to slur his speech. Seeking to alleviate concerns about his health, Ecevit—for the first time in two months—appeared before the media in early July. The move backfired when he, evidently, found it difficult to string together an intelligible sentence.

As I say, he seems tailor-made for the EU.

The leader of the far-right MHP ventured the opinion that new elections are necessary because "political uncertainty" is damaging the economy (the Turkish lira has lost 20% of its value and interest rates have climbed by 15% since Ecevit's illness). Mr. Ecevit and (get this) his wife, Rashan who is a co-founder of the Democratic Left Party *accused the Deputy Prime Minister of not doing enough to support his embattled chief. Which has led to the resignation of the Deputy PM, four other ministers and 27 other Democratic Left Party members. If 33 more members resign, the government will collapse and polls indicate the biggest winner may be the moderate Islamist party, Justice and Development.*

[I'm having trouble staying ahead of events, here. This morning's news (17 July) brings word that Ecevit has bowed to the inevitable and has called for elections in November, eighteen months earlier than is required by law. A paragraph regarding EU conditions for Turkey's proposed membership makes no mention of "free speech" "issues". Ecevit met yesterday with American Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz. No word on how intelligible Mr. Ecevit's sentences were.]

So, unfortunately (in my view) no, there appears to be no interest in how Turkey managed to accommodate Islam and to maintain a modern, secular state. The active participation of the army in "undoing" election results will, of course, be severely problematical from a left-liberal standpoint. But then, Islamist governments are also *severely problematical from a left-liberal standpoint, aren't they? Small wonder that our age is characterized by what I would describe as "left-liberal paralysis". My own view is that this* could *represent a promising development in Turkey depending on* how *moderate the Justice and Development party actually proves to be. If the moderate Justice and Development party proves itself to be nothing more "moderate" than another tiresome variation on Wahabite Islam—like the Taliban's Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (you know: the kinder, gentler stoning of adulterers, the humane amputation of the hands of thieves and the compassionate, caring flagellation of those caught consuming alcohol)—that is, if the party proves itself to be just another "back-to-the-seventh-century" Wahabite Islamist sect then the EU and the Middle East will have bought itself a peck of trouble by blindly forcing Turkey to guarantee the right of free speech to religious groups which have previously been held in check only through political and military force. And, quite possibly, the EU may yet, as a result, "turn" the only secular Muslim country from a guiding star for those who favour the separation of mosque and state into a guiding star for those Muslims unshakeable in their faith that Islam is still capable of over-turning the "rule of the infidel," even in those countries where Islam has, hitherto, been suppressed as a political force—and that such an over-turning often takes place* (inshallah!) *with the unwitting assistance of the infidels themselves! Quite a lesson for Turkey's Muslims on their way to full participation in the governing councils of the EU—all of whose member nations boast sizeable Muslim populations of their own. I am hopeful, however, that the Wahabite domination of Islam is on the wane and it would surprise me if Turkey—which has had such a long history of steering a torturous course through the troubled waters of dealing equitably with Islam while avoiding capitulation to those excesses to which Islam is, self-evidently, inclined—manifests anything remotely resembling the Islamic status quo. If there is a moderate form of Islam in the offing, it seems to me more likely than not that one of the cradles into which it is likely to be born will be in Turkey.*

Is *there a more moderate form of Islam in the offing? I think there is, although most of the evidence at this point is anecdotal. I think we have come through a time period in which Islam showed signs of posing greater long-term danger to the West than it does today. I'm thinking of the anti-*

nationalism of Mawlana Mawdudi in Pakistan, Sayyid Qutb in Egypt and Kohomeini in Iran, all of whom developed wide followings for their anti-nationalist views (fortunately, only within *their own nations) and all of whom favoured the emergence of a monolithic, steam-rolling Nation of Islam along Wahabite lines which would supersede Pakistan, Egypt and Iran and all forms of geopolitical loyalty—in short all three endeavoured to seize the brass ring of the Mantle of the Prophet. In retrospect, I think it can be seen as a 60's phenomenon—very much a Muslim reaction to the lunatic excesses of the Baby Boom generation in the West (which was widely seen in the Muslim world as* jahiliyya, *an Arabic term for the age of total barbarism which preceded Islam. Looking at the 60's through Muslim eyes, I can see their point).*

And I think it is safe to say that the proven ability of television (despite television's inherently fraudulent nature) to transform any culture—in spite of each culture's best efforts to resist change—should never be underestimated. Feminism, as an example, would not have been possible without the televised portrayal of women characters—whose dialogue was almost exclusively written by men—as more sensible, intelligent and competent than women actually are. Leading up to 1970, television trained women to think of themselves in that way and trained men to think of women that way. The fact that women control virtually all discretionary household spending in North America continues to feed the fraudulent, but successful, syndrome. A television show which flatters women compels them to spend their husbands' (and, less importantly, their own) discretionary income on the products it advertises. The more overt and shameless the flattery (Oprah Winfrey leaps to mind) the greater the influence on discretionary household spending. This is quickly becoming the case in many Muslim countries as well. Evidently the most-watched television program in Egypt during the last holy month of Ramadan was a mini-series called The Family of Hag Metwalli, *about a man with four wives. Though permitted by Islam, polygamy is frowned upon in many segments of Egyptian society. Assuming that* The Family of Hag Metwalli *is comparable to North American mini-series, that is, that it was a histrionic commercial fiction with just enough of a basis in reality to pass itself off as "informative," containing just enough salacious garbage to attract female interest while remaining insufficiently explicit to excite female revulsion (in other words, inherently fraudulent but sufficiently flattering to women and sufficiently indulgent of their overweening interest in "dirt"—gossip—as to compel those who control most discretionary spending to watch it avidly and then, in Pavlovian fashion, to spend freely on the products and services it advertised) it will, in my view, have had a greater effect than the immediate commercial interests which underlie all television. During commercial interruptions (and, next day, over the Egyptian equivalent of the water-cooler), viewpoints on polygamy will have been expressed by those who, prior to that, hadn't so much as considered polygamy, even in the abstract. I think it safe to say that Egyptian viewpoints on polygamy will have changed more dramatically in the period of time that the mini-series aired than in the previous umpty-ump centuries. Just as I believe that Alex Haley's* Roots *mini-series probably had more of an effect on attitudes towards blacks in North America than all of the efforts of the NAACP, the U.S. Congress, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X rolled into one. The information about* The Family of Hag Metwalli *was contained in an Agence France-Presse article headlined "Egyptian jailed for having one wife too many":*

> A wealthy Egyptian businessman was sentenced to seven years of hard labour in prison yesterday for having five wives, exceeding the Muslim legal limit of four, and having entered into brief marriages with 29 minors. Sayed Ragab al-Sawarki, 52, was found guilty of entering "brief unions" with 29 girls under the age of 15 by having their birth dates falsified on official documents...Ahmed Amin Salim and Sayyed Ismail Madkur, bureaucrats whose job is to draw up marriage records, were each sentenced to two years of hard labour for helping Sawarki forge documents. A woman and her two brothers were each sentenced to three years in prison for falsifying birth certificates of the girls who were to marry Sawarki...He would stay married to them for a matter of hours or days before divorcing them and paying them sums of money, the police said.

This has a definite basis in Islamic reality, shariat *law, governing marriage. A marriage is contracted with an agreed-upon dowry bestowed upon the wife (it becomes her money, not her father's or her family's as is the case in many cultures and tribes). Divorce is a matter of the husband just saying, that's it, we're divorced. If the divorce takes place after consummation of the marriage, the*

wife retains her dowry. If the engagement is broken, the wife returns a percentage of the dowry. What is theologically interesting about the above situation is the idea of conforming to the letter of Muslim law regarding marriage, while, clearly indulging in acts of prostitution (and child *prostitution at that). But, leaving aside the ages of al-Sawarki's "brief union" "wives"—let's say that they were all nineteen or twenty—I'd be curious as to how that plays out under the letter of Muslim law. What would an imam on the basis of "sacred scriptures and prophetic traditions" have to say about a series of "brief union" marriages where every agreed-upon penny (agreed upon by the wife's family) of the "dowry" was paid? How common an occurrence is that in Islam? How great is the lack of curiosity about a pillar of the Muslim community who uses his wealth and his prominence to indulge in (let us call a spade a spade) prostitution while claiming complete Islamic legitimacy—so long as he doesn't have more than four "brief union" "wives" at one time?*

But my point is actually tangential to that: the story of Sayed Ragab al-Sawarki would never be considered for a mini-series even though it seems (at least to me) of more monumental theological and societal consequence, representing a potentially greater centre of societal corruption. Why? Because although it has great potential as an "informative" subject, as a representative anecdote which could be used to address a (society-wide?) "letter of the law" potential for corruption, it crosses the female boundary between salacious garbage—gossip—into areas which excite genuine female disgust and revulsion. The potential female viewer (and women are always—except for professional sports television's target audience) would find no point of identification in al-Sawarki's story. No woman would want to be one of his long-term wives and no woman would want to be one of his "brief union" wives. As for identifying with the woman who helped falsify the birth records of one of her daughters, well, of course not. She is disowned from the female ranks. There is no female curiosity about her, what would have led her to make the decision, what she told her underage daughter as she falsified her birth records in preparation for her "marriage". All these female "roles" are perceived by women to be beyond the female pale (as is anything which women find unflattering to their gender). Whereas in the case of the fictional Hag Metwalli, *there is great potential for identification. In fact, I'd be willing to bet that the central appeal of the mini-series for women was, "Which wife did I identify with?" The headstrong, independent one (I will bet dollars to donuts that there was a headstrong, independent one), the caring, nurturing arbitrator? Larger interests can be introduced to women through televison—but only tangentially. They pay attention to that which flatters them disproportionately and which titillates them within acceptable female parameters. I never saw* Roots, *but I would be terribly surprised if it did not prominently feature a headstrong, independent female character and I would be equally surprised if she (whoever she was) had been either* that *prominent,* that *headstrong or* that *independent in Alex Haley's book—if she had even existed at all. So, while television offers great potential for sweeping societal change, it does have its limits: primarily, in my view, the female requirement that televised entertainment must flatter women and it must stay within the boundaries of what women will accept in the way of salacious garbage and fictional gossip. Television will do its bit in moving Muslim populations in the direction of left-liberal, quasi-socialist feminism but, in my view, its progress will be limited by what is (presumably) a wider spectrum of subjects and themes that would excite disgust and revulsion within Muslim women and which are, by now, mother's milk to the degraded sensibilities of left-liberal, quasi-socialist secular Western feminists. The standards of Muslim women have to first be extensively eroded within their own collectivist boundaries of what constitutes (first) acceptable attitudes and (second) acceptable behaviour in fictional television characters before they will adopt those attitudes and behaviours—in the way that women had to, first, share the attitudes of Alice Kramden on* The Honeymooners *(talking back to her husband, ignoring his threats, while remaining, in the collectivist female view, a good person) before collectively adopting her behaviour (which began a process which led, ultimately, to the collectivist female adoption of, first, the attitudes and then the behaviours of Roseanne Barr on* Roseanne) *(pride in ignorance, pride in sloth, talking back to everyone—in the collectivist female view, "not taking any s—t"—while remaining, in the collectivist female view, a good person). It will be a much lengthier process for television to turn* Muslim *women into Alice Kramden and—with a sufficient number of Western Roseanne Barr-types (that is, women whose attitudes and behaviours largely excite a disgust and revulsion in Muslim women comparable to the disgust and revulsion which Sayed Ragab al-Sawarki's child prostitution "marriages" excites within all women) existing at the periphery of the reality which Muslim women inhabit and accept (and, as is always the case with Roseanne Barr types, endlessly endeavouring to hurl themselves*

from any societal periphery in which they find themselves to whatever position they perceive as a societal "front and centre")(there to exhibit loudly and to the exclusion of all other voices their pride in their own ignorance, their pride in their own sloth and their pride in "not taking any s--t")—I'm not sure there exists sufficient time (even if that turns out to be ten thousand years) before Judgement Day to turn Muslim women into Roseanne Barr.

[The first glimmerings of Western-style feminism—the demand for full and equal participation in societal decision-making by a number of female Saudi intellectuals was greeted by the Saudi royal family with the suggestion that any assistance the women of Saudi Arabia could provide in rolling back the astronomical dowries being demanded by potential wives—which has rendered marriage in Saudi Arabia a luxury affordable only by the very wealthiest men and which has brought about an exponential rise in the population of "old maids"—would be most welcome and would be considered a most appropriate place to begin active female participation in the areas of Saudi social engineering. This, evidently, was not what the women had in mind and appears, for the time being, to have brought to an end female demands to become active participants in the restructuring of Saudi society.]

The events of 11 September have turned a spotlight on Islam that will not be turned away anytime soon, a spotlight that demands answers, coherent answers, answers which are grounded in reality and which are demonstrably the product of sequential reasoning. It is insufficient to describe Islam as a religion of peace while acknowledging that laws based on its sacred text, the Koran, demand the stoning of adulterers, the amputation of a thief's hands and the flagellation of those who drink alcohol. Those Muslims who have been fully assimilated within the West but who still retain a primary loyalty to their faith are experiencing, individually, the wrenching schism that usually takes place only within communities, nations and churches. Their loyalties are inescapably divided in a way which would have been inconceivable to them prior to 11 September. How can Muslims argue that Islam is misunderstood when the evidence indicates that, actually, Islam is understood only too well by those who have been raised to think for themselves and to test their beliefs in the crucible of contrary viewpoints? In the fall of last year, most Muslim writings and most Muslim views quoted in the newspapers and magazines consisted of simplistic recitations of Islamic cant along the lines of "You can't understand Islam in Western terms." Well, yes you can. You can understand anything *in Western terms. Western terms have been evolving since the Greeks in such a way that Western terms arguably constitute the* best *means of understanding* any *subject and testing that subject to see if it has a solid foundation of rational thought behind it or if it is pure emotionalism, quackery or mumbo-jumbo. Up until 11 September, Islam had gotten pretty much the same "free ride" in our society as feminism. And, in my view, there is no shortage of emotionalism, quackery or mumbo-jumbo to be found in the Koran, just as there is no shortage of those three to be found in the Torah, in the Books of the Prophets, in the Gospels and in the Canonical Christian commentaries. I would defend and uphold the five pillars of Islam in any forum and under any conditions. If you want me to defend a specific Koranic verse, however, you're going to have to show me the verse and the context. I might defend it or I might admit that, personally, I find it indefensible. In my view, this is the unaccustomed corner in which Islam found—and now finds—itself thanks in no small part to Osama bin Laden. As he said in his video-taped interview in December, "This event* [11 September] *made people think about true Islam, which benefited Islam greatly." In the long-term, I believe that that's true. An actual on-going examination of Islam in dispassionate Western terms by Muslims and non-Muslims, I believe, will reveal where the skeletons are in the Muslim closet—foremost among these, to me, the Koreish usurpation of the caliphate and the admitted abridgement of the text of the Koran by Osman as well as the (in my view) too extensive reliance on "prophetic traditions" in establishing* shariat *law (since there was only one Prophet in Islam, doesn't that mean that a "prophetic tradition" would have to necessarily be attributable specifically to Muhammad—and specifically when he was reciting the verses of the Koran –to qualify for the term? That is, isn't it theologically sound to say that a "prophetic tradition" is only valid if it is found in "sacred scripture"?). In the immediate aftermath of 11 September, as is now fundamental, as is now central to the nature of society in the Western Democracies, Hard Questions were asked about—and of—Islam. And were answered by what were, unquestionably, easy, circuitous rationalisations and practiced, glib assertions. Ten months later, the easy, circuitous rationalisations (which grew no less easy, no less circuitous over time) and practiced, glib assertions (which grew no less practiced, no less glib over time) seem, at last, to have given way to a sullen silence which—at least in the case of non-feminists—usually prefigures gen-*

uine introspection, genuine self-examination, genuine soul-searching. In feminists it usually just denotes sulking.

A news item from 1st May mentioned that the ninth execution-by-beheading this year had taken place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the day before. The item noted that that compared with eighty-one executions by beheading the previous year. It may not look like much. But it seems to me that that, too, represents progress of a kind.

[This morning's National Post (18 July) *brings word that the 24th execution-by-beheading of the year took place yesterday in the southern Saudi province of Assir]*

Part VII

"Mr. Bush was telling us what is a martyr…God forbids
Bush from telling us who is a martyr."
An unnamed Jordanian imam quoted in the New York Times, *reacting to President Bush's assertion that "suicide bombers are murderers not martyrs."*

"A group like al-Qaeda cannot be deterred or placated or reasoned with at a conference table. For that reason, this struggle will not end with a treaty or accommodation of terrorists. It can only end in their complete and utter destruction."
U.S. Vice-President, Dick Cheney

What I think needs to be recalled in the Western Democracies is what, exactly, *is it* that we are in favour of?—what, specifically, *is it* that separates us from Wahabite Muslims? what *is it* that we are willing to fight for and, if need be, to die for in the War on Terrorism? We have become such purists in the field of human freedoms that it is difficult to not view ourselves as nations which have simply eroded into a grey, squishy philosophical pudding that believes that everything is okay, really it is. It doesn't matter what it is, we agree with it. 11 September put an end to that perception of ourselves. It seems to me that what we, the Western Democracies, believe in is the freedom to choose and our belief that the freedom of the individual to choose must supersede the freedom of the state—or any governing authority—to infringe upon that freedom without a valid, demonstrable, logic-based cause. Thus, we, the Western Democracies believe in the freedom of the individual to participate in a religion and the freedom to practice that religion. We also believe in the freedom of an individual to *not* participate in a religion and the freedom to *not* practice a religion (which was a nuance, admittedly, rather late in arriving at the forefront of our consciousness: through the long centuries where we, the Western Democracies, were more aptly described as "Christendom," with all the deplorable suppressions and oppressions of people's freedoms and unwarranted exaltations of our own preferred worship that for the better part of two millennia—that implied). Where the clash of civilizations between the Western Democracies and fundamentalist Islam takes place, now, is that fundamentalist Islam holds that it, Islam, supersedes the freedom of the state—*any* state (in exactly the way that we, the Western Democracies, view the rights of the individual to supersede the freedom of the state) because to Islamic fundamentalists, Islam represents the Will of God. *L'état, c'est Dieu,* in a manner of speaking. Those states which are not Muslim states are considered by fundamentalist Islam to be infidel states which must be overthrown if Islam is to achieve what fundamentalist Islam believes to be the motivating force behind Islam: the belief that it is God's intention that the entire world must—and *will*—one day convert to Islam. Clearly, this represents a fundamental disagreement, a "deal-breaker" between Islam and the Western Democracies writ large and—so long as a significant portion of the Muslim world adheres to this view and endeavours to bring about just such a fulfilment by whatever means it deems necessary, well, the inescapable conclusion, in my view would have to be:

"Of course, you realize this means *WAR*!"

Yes, the classic Groucho Marx/Bugs Bunny line—which is only funny, really, in peacetime and only to those who, in peacetime, are seduced by and, thus, hold firmly to the view that war can never be regarded as an *inevitable* outcome but only as the result of a failure of good will, a failure to communicate with sufficient eloquence a desire for peace or (as is the popularly held view in our feminist age) as the result of a failure to properly curtail masculine aggression. And yet situations do exist where war becomes inevitable. The German invasion of Poland in 1939 is a perfect example. The bombing of Pearl Harbor is another. There was no way to answer those actions which did not involve physical confrontation and bloodshed. It was not a matter of finding and encouraging "moderate elements" within the Nazi high command or in proximity to the Japanese Emperor. "If only we could have thrown our diplomatic weight behind Goebbels and encouraged the German people to restrict Hitler to a ceremonial position." It just wasn't that kind of situation. Nor, today, in our own world, post-11 September, do I think any reasonable person can believe that it is a sensible course of action to seek out "moderate elements" within the ranks of the Wahabite Muslims or to try to open lines of communication and nurture areas of common interest. The late Daniel Pearl attempted to do that as a journalist and, unfortunately for himself and his family, became a perfect example of why that won't work. The viewpoints are irreconcilable: not "difficult to reconcile". Irreconcilable. Either Wahabite Islam will prevail or the belief in Democracy and its foundational belief in individual human rights superseding those of any earthly authority will prevail. The choices that Muslim countries make in the next few years regarding Wahabite Islam will either gradually decrease tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim countries, or their choices will bring those tensions to an acute level where World War III will become inevitable. By declaring War on Terrorism, the United States has essentially drawn a line in the sand and has essentially already said (rightly, in my view) that World War III will be the result if Wahabite Islam as exemplified by Osama bin Laden, the Taliban and 11 September, which divides the world into Muslim and non-Muslim and which views the targeting of non-Muslim civilian populations, women, children and the elderly, as valid forms of warfare—is not curtailed, suppressed and confined by Muslim states. Wahabite Islam will be curtailed, suppressed and confined by Muslim states or Wahabite Islam will be curtailed, suppressed and *eliminated* by the United States as was accomplished by the United States in eliminating Wahabite Islam from Afghanistan. Which one will it be? There is no way of knowing at this point. In my view, a lot hinges on a) whether there are any further terrorist attacks, b) which countries they target and c) how large those attacks are. At the one extreme you have 11 September. At the other extreme you have the "lone Muslim nut" who shot the girl behind the counter at the El Al ticket counter at LAX. It is not difficult to see why the U.S. government chose not to describe the latter as a terrorist attack. To do so would be to imply that some reciprocal action—some further step on the road to World War III—would be taken. The guy shot a few people, he got shot himself. Pretty straightforward. Eye for an eye. Nothing we didn't know already, but it's nice to have an example to show the Wahabite Muslims that the U.S. means business. Shoot someone in an airport in the United States, post-11 September, and you have forfeited your right to continue breathing. No one is going to tell you to drop the gun. No one is going to try to disarm you, no one is going to shoot you in the leg or the shoulder. And whoever kills you is certainly not going to face murder charges. In between those two extremes 11 September and the "lone Muslim nut" at LAX—you have the "Palestinian" terrorists blowing themselves up in Jerusalem. To me, that means that the War on Terrorism, right now, is confined to Israel. The frontline in the War on Terrorism is Jaffa Street in Jerusalem. That is where it is being fought and it is being fought with the lives of Israeli civilians. Ariel Sharon is the one who is currently leading the War on Terrorism. Although President George Bush is the Supreme Commander in the War on Terrorism (and if he's not, I'd sure like to know who is), he has given Sharon a free hand as a Deputy Commander to root out the terrorists, their bomb factories and their leadership. And has stated explicitly that he will support the formation of a Democratic State called Palestine in the West Bank (and presumably Gaza) but he will not support the formation of a Muslim dictatorship in the West Bank (and presumably Gaza). Now it is up to the Muslim states, the "Palestinians" and the Arab League to decide what their reaction to this is going to be. They can either stop their terrorist attacks on Israel and begin to build a democratic infrastructure in those territories supervised by the Palestinian Authority—that will pass muster with the standards of the United States and Israel as vanguard democracies—or they can be walled off from civilization and left to their own Wahabite Islamic devices on the other side of the Israeli equivalent of "Checkpoint Charlie". I'm not sure how many "Checkpoints" there were in the Berlin Wall, but there weren't

many of them and not very many people passed through them, even temporarily. If the people in the refugee camps think they suffer deprivation now, they should ask the former East Germans about what further levels of deprivation they can expect. I'm leap-frogging the current Middle East geopolitical realities here—where the 300-mile-long security fence currently under construction by Israel is intended (by most Israelis) to be just that: a fence between themselves and the "Palestinians" which will be a border crossing with the usual amount of human and vehicular traffic associated with border crossings. I think that Ariel Sharon is too much a military realist to not recognize that once the security fence is in place, he faces the same problem represented by a comparable barricade erected by the Israelis between northern Israel and Lebanon: limited military responses (of the kind the Israelis have been using in occupying and withdrawing, occupying and withdrawing from the cities of the West Bank) become impossible. You can't roll your tanks and trucks through your own barricades in response to a series of homicide bombings. You are limited to covert infiltration and targeted killings by IDF Special Forces (without the back-up of mobile artillery) at the low-end of your response options and massive aerial retaliation at the high-end of your response options. Once the security fence is erected, I imagine Sharon will use the first option long enough to show the left-liberal, quasi-socialist world community that it won't work, that it doesn't deter "Palestinian" attacks and will then begin turning the security fence into a Middle East version of the Berlin Wall—no one in, no one out—secure in the knowledge that once his options are limited to massive aerial strikes and his borders are secure, Israel wins by virtue of the fact that it has modern firepower and the "Palestinians" don't. The U.S. will re-supply Israel as needed and probably upgrade Israeli weaponry (not to the current levels of U.S. sophistication but enough to allow the Israelis the same pin-point accuracy the U.S. maintained)(give or take a wedding or two)(in Afghanistan). That is, the War on Terrorism will be continued in the West Bank as it was begun in Afghanistan—all of the casualties will be on the Terrorist side of the ledger, with a certain increase in the amount of collateral damage to "Palestinian" civilians. The entire left-liberal quasi-socialist world community (which, unfortunately, counts Canada among its active membership) will deplore these casualties and there will be an exponential increase in acts of anti-Semitism in the countries of the EU but, in my view, massive aerial retaliation will work on "Palestinians" just as effectively as it did on the Taliban, eliminating terrorist Wahabite Islam from those territories and countries of the Middle East which border on Israel and resulting in the emergence of an Arab, "Palestinian" and/or Muslim majority which will begin the too-long delayed movement to democratization in those same territories and countries.

To me, what is essential is for the Western Democracies to maintain their resolve in this situation, that Wahabite Islam is completely acceptable as a religious faith practiced by ascetic and devout individuals and is completely unacceptable as the foundation for attacking civilian populations in democratic countries. We must steel ourselves to take a hard line on these issues and to maintain that hard line. The peril represented by the least "softness" on Wahabite Islam or allowing the perception to take hold that "softness" on Wahabite Islam is even a remote future possibility is—post-11 September—just too terrible to contemplate. The biggest danger that I foresee as events unfold is represented by feminism and the feminizing of the Western Democracies which fortunately (but not coincidentally) has experienced its least success in the United States. Having allowed women to vote and having allowed women into the decision-making processes in the Western Democracies, the odds increase of the West "going soft" in the War on Terrorism with each day that passes which separates us from the events of 11 September and which bring no further large-scale acts of terror against civilian populations in democratic countries outside of Israel. Where compassion overwhelms common sense and the ability to perceive accurately erodes into wishful thinking, there you will find feminists, male and female. I'll be discussing this more thoroughly in "Why Canada Slept".

So far, the United States, in my view, has done a commendable job of treading the fine line between human rights and wartime national security. But it is a fine line where, again, in my view, some errors need to be made on the side of the diminishing of human rights—those rights which the United States has always held sacred—for those individuals who fit the profile of Wahabite Islamic terrorists. Every single person on the FBI's Most Wanted Terrorist List which catalogues people wanted for participating in terrorist crimes committed since 1985, is a young or middle-aged Arabic-speaking Muslim male with dark brown or black hair, dark eyes and an olive or dark complexion. Before 11 September the targeting of a specific racial or national group could legitimately be described as "racial profiling" and could legitimately be deplored and safely ruled unconscionable by those who believe in the sanctity of individual human freedoms, as we all do. After 11 September,

I still believe that this holds true—except for young men from Muslim countries. In my view it is foolish in the extreme either to a) make everyone a target of increased airport security, thus diminishing everyone's individual human freedoms or b) to randomly target airport security at a percentage of young men from Muslim countries while ignoring the rest. Let me put it this way:

If the planes that were hijacked and flown into the World Trade Center buildings had been hijacked by members of the Irish Republican Army, all of whom had been trained in Ireland and had been living in West Germany, Spain, the United States, England and France up until 11 September, I would think it only sensible that every guy with an "O" and an apostrophe at the front of his last name or an Irish passport or an Irish accent or who was arriving on a flight from Belfast would *reasonably* have to expect to be subject to increased airport security, surveillance and scrutiny. It also seems to me that—if the government of Ireland had expressed as little contrition and accepted as little blame and was as unforthcoming in assisting the United States in investigating the perpetrators of the crime, their organizations and their associates as Saudi Arabia has been since 11 September—that would more than justify—would, in fact, make mandatory—the erosion of the human rights of all Irish nationals living in the United States for a period of time that could (again, in my view) justifiably remain…fluid…until such time as the conditions of war (and I'm sure the United States would have declared war on the Irish Republican Army) changed. Changed, first and foremost, in response to the collective will of "We, the People" in the United States. If "We, the People" in the United States disagree, collectively, with the internment and interrogation of Irish Republican Army prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, you will be sure to read a Gallup Poll to that effect on the front pages of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post.* It is also safe to draw a negative-left-liberal-inference that—absent "American people deplore internment of terrorists, interrogations" headlines on the front pages of those newspapers—the on-going support of "We, the People," for "internment, interrogations" is, indeed, the case. Likewise with the "we mean business" approach to the internment of Irish nationals until such time as they can establish their bona fides to the satisfaction of what constitutes reason and common sense (i.e. an Irish national being found in possession of multiple passports would, presumably, forfeit his right to basic human freedoms unless and until he could explain in a way that would satisfy reason and common sense *why* he has multiple passports. If the passports contain his photo but are registered under different names, you basically lock him up and "misplace" the key for a few years—under the reasonable and common-sense assumption that this would send a very valuable message to other Irish nationals considering ordering an extra passport or two under different names). I don't think "We, the People" of *any* democracy could argue successfully that a person with multiple passports bearing different names is entitled to the same human freedoms as the rest of us. I think many people could argue the point *unsuccessfully,* but I think they should have their heads examined and, in a state of war, should be completely ignored. It is a measure of just how large and unconscionable the events of 11 September were that the world's premiere vanguard democracy has been able to maintain—virtually without dissent—its temporary suspension of basic human freedoms for those who fit the profile of the perpetrators of those events for a period of (at this point) ten months and (looking forward) with no end in sight. I believe there will come a day (if no further terrorist acts take place) when those human freedoms will be restored and I believe that day will come only when it becomes inescapably apparent that "We, the People" in the United States have decided that the day has come (and will be signalled by headlines in *The Washington Post* and the *New York Times,* "Bush policies worse than Hitler, Stalin 52% of Americans agree"). But not until. I believe the biggest impediment to that day arriving is the continued unwillingness of the Saudi Royal family to express genuine contrition, accept genuine blame and to enter whole-heartedly into assisting the United States to investigate the 11 September perpetrators who were all—hair-splitting arguments aside—Saudi nationals.

> "We can hear rumblings in the [U.S.] Muslim community about the need to keep fighting against profiling…People say profiling makes them feel like criminals. It does—I know this firsthand. But would that I had been made to feel like a criminal a thousand times than to live to see the grisly handiwork of real criminals in New York and Washington."
>
> *Arab-American Tarek Masoud*
> *in* The Wall Street Journal

Why is it that that contrition, that acceptance of blame, and that assistance—ten months later—is *still* not forthcoming from Saudi Arabia?

I think it is worth considering that there is easily as much—and actually a great deal more—fear of Wahabite Islam among the hierarchies of the Arab dictatorships than there is in the Western Democracies. I believe that that fear is so pronounced and so desperate that it supersedes all other diplomatic and international considerations by a wide margin—among the Arab dictatorships, in the Palestinian Authority, at OPEC. The militant, terrorist Wahabite Muslims and their derivative incarnations—whether one is discussing al-Qaeda, the Taliban, Hamas, Hezbolleh, Islamic Jihad or the others—have one thing in common. They are certifiably insane, in the exact way that the Nazis were certifiably insane: their perceptions of right and wrong are so skewed as to place them beyond the pale of reasoned discourse. Like the Nazis, none of them represent a national majority, and, like the Nazis, where they have been granted influence or where they have seized power they ruthlessly pursue a course of wanton destruction. Like the Nazis, they blame the Jews for their every misfortune. Like the Nazis, they are convinced that nothing will end their misfortune but the utter destruction of the Jews. Like the Nazis, their first recourse is always violence and bloodshed. Like the Nazis, it is impossible to appease them. Like the Nazis, whatever level of appeasement is offered them is viewed by them as a "gimme," as a "freebie" which they are happy to accept…sequentially, successively and incrementally. *Un*like the Nazis, they do not (I don't believe) accept the fact that at some point efforts to appease them will come to an end (in the sense that I *do* believe that Hitler understood that at some point he would no longer be ceded territory and would be forced to use whatever territory, power and influence had been ceded to him as a staging area for military, rather than diplomatic, conquest). *Un*like the five years in which Europe's Great Democracies endeavoured to appease Hitler, the appeasement of Wahabite Islam has been the misguided policy of the Arab world for *decades*—if not, arguably, for more than a *century*. And *un*like the Nazis, the Wahabite Muslim belief that they are "striving in the path of God" and that their murder of women, children, babies and the elderly is mandated by God supersedes nationality, national interest and simple territorial ambitions.

It is that level of insanity, and that level of cold-blooded violence which, in my view, engenders and has engendered an almost unimaginable level of fear among non-Wahabite Muslims. I think that what we will see in the coming months and years, is a gradual recognition among non-Wahabite Muslims that the Muslim fear of Wahabite Muslims is no more valid, has no greater basis in reality than the fear that the German people had of the Nazis, or the fear that the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza have of Yasser Arafat and his "security forces," of Hamas, of Hezbolleh, of Islamic Jihad. They are thugs, pure and simple. As the Taliban and al-Qaeda are thugs, pure and simple. The elimination of a thug is purely a matter of identification and the application of superior force of the kind the United States demonstrated in Afghanistan and which Israel is now demonstrating in the West Bank (having taken into account the inescapable price of a temporary world-wide escalation of anti-Semitism): that it possesses the superior force and the national will to use it against Yasser Arafat's "security forces" and against the terrorist organizations which have gotten by for too long on the illusion that they, too, possess firepower comparable to that of the world community.

Of course there is also the insular nature of Islam itself, which takes justifiable pride in being the recipient of God's Last Revelation to the World (a pride comparable to Christians with their New, Improved Testament) but which tends also to a disproportionate sense of self-importance in more…temporal…matters (the Jordanian imam quoted above, telling the President of the United States that God forbids him to decide who is and who is not a martyr is an example of this syndrome) particularly where Islam, a Muslim nation or a Muslim individual is involved. If an accurate perception of the severe limitations of Islamic firepower isn't actively demonstrated on an on-going basis, Muslims will retreat at the first opportunity to a wholly inaccurate perception of themselves and their opponents. Along that line, it was with no small measure of amusement—on the occasion of Colin Powell's last tour of the Middle East—that I read the *National Post* headline, "U.S. credibility collapsing, Saudi Prince tells Powell". This, you will recall, came shortly after U.S. Vice-President Cheney had returned from a comparable tour of the region. I suspect that—knowing Secretary Powell's dove-ish inclinations—the Vice-President said, "Mr. President, why don't you have Mr. Powell go over and talk to some of these…fellows. I think he'd find it very…enlightening."

Shortly after Mr. Powell was asked icily by Moroccan King Mohammed why he had not

headed straight to Jerusalem, Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah told him in a meeting that the United States must restrain Israel. "U.S. interests in the region are suffering gravely. U.S. credibility and prestige are collapsing quickly," said Adel al-Jubeir, a Saudi foreign policy advisor, paraphrasing the Prince.

I'm just guessing, but I suspect the Vice-President found the progressively more glazed look and artificial smile in the news photos of the Secretary of State's face as his Middle Eastern tour proceeded confirmation that Mr. Powell had been as thoroughly…enlightened…as had the Vice-President before him. Something along the lines of, "What in the HELL are these people TALKING about? We just KICKED THE TALIBAN'S ASS around the block in FIVE WEEKS without breaking a SWEAT! We had more JOURNALIST casualties than MILITARY casualties! That sounds pretty damned CREDIBLE to ME!"

The United States has…gradually…been trying to break the news to its Arab allies. David Warren in the *Ottawa Citizen* wrote:

Colin Powell has, this year, made a much bigger issue of the State Department's human rights reports and has been willing to say aloud—about the Uzbeki regime of Islam Karimov, for instance—things no U.S. administration has ever said before about an ally. Even President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt has received an earful, though not publicly. (Saudi Arabia's crown prince, Abdullah, protects himself against such hectoring by going berserk the moment it starts.)

In announcing the Secretary of State's mission, President Bush, in a White House Rose Garden speech, 4 April, had said, "America itself counts former adversaries as trusted friends—Germany, Japan and now Russia. Conflict is not inevitable. Distrust need not be permanent. Peace is possible when we break free of old patterns and habits of hatred." His language was perhaps too diplomatic for the occasion or perhaps it was too soon after the U.S.'s overwhelming military victory in Afghanistan or perhaps it was a little of both, but for anyone willing to read the President's words with their eyes open, the writing was clearly on the wall: Germany, prior to becoming a trusted American ally, had needed to be purged of fascism and (unfortunate, but them's the breaks) that had required that the country be crushed militarily. Japan, prior to becoming a trusted American ally had needed to be purged of quasi-religious Imperialist pretensions of world conquest and (unfortunate, but them's the breaks) that had required the country to be subjected to atomic bombing. Russia, prior to becoming a trusted American ally, had needed to be stripped of its *Marxist* pretensions of world conquest and (rather wisely I thought) chose complete capitulation over either the German or Japanese Option.

In my opinion, we are at the point where the U.S. State Department may finally have recognized what most right wingers—and even such notables on the "other team" as Nathan Sharansky, the Russian dissident—have been saying for some time: no progress is possible in the Middle East until the Arab countries democratize. If this seems unlikely, then I think it worth considering what (unless I miss my guess) the U.S. approach will be: to militarily impose a regime change in the *least* democratic of the Arab nations (in the American view, Iraq—I'd say Syria, myself, but, hey, it's American ordinance, American military personnel and American tax dollars so, Iraq it is) in a conflict comparable to the war in Afghanistan, allowing for a war, say, five times the duration (that is, six months) and, say, ten times the American casualties (eighty, maybe ninety) to be followed by international assistance in the development of democratic structures and institutions while also allowing the U.S. time to (you know) reload and while they're (you know) reloading, to give the other Arab dictators time to (you know) mull things over and see if some or (heck) even all of them might just be able to see their way clear to maybe doing a little Wahabite-ectomy on themselves before the Americans, once they're (you know) finished…reloading…end up having to decide for themselves who the *next* Arab dictatorship is that needs a little (you know) radical surgery in the interest of its own (you know) *long-term* health requirements.

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The title of this series of articles has been "Islam, My Islam". Had I seen a need, I could have

written a series of companion pieces of comparable length entitled "Christianity, My Christianity" or "Judaism, My Judaism". As I have stated elsewhere, I work very hard at maintaining a co-equivalency in my own mind between the three great monotheistic faiths. To me, the Books of Moses, the Gospels and the Koran represent the beginning, middle and end of God's revelation of Himself to the world. Out of each of the foundational sacred texts, I pick and choose what it is that I believe, what it is that I give greater or lesser emphasis to in my own system of belief, that which I choose to participate in and that which I choose not to participate in (while scrupulously avoiding grafting anything onto the texts from outside of monotheism in spite of various intellectual temptations to do so). This is, of course, very much frowned upon by the entrenched theocratic hierarchies which have formed within Judaism, Christianity and Islam. One is advised to consult with experts in the faith, to find a rabbi (or a minister or an imam) who can guide you in your beliefs. What seems implicit to me (and what has seemed implicit from the time I began studying the Bible six years ago) is that one still has to choose for oneself. Even if one becomes convinced that Judaism is the only true path to God, one is still faced with the choice between Orthodox Judaism or Reformed Judaism, the choice between the innumerable nuanced variations within each of those primary divisions. If one becomes convinced that Christianity is the only true path to God, one has to choose between Catholicism and Protestantism, Greek Orthodox, Anglicanism, Baptist and so on. If one becomes convinced that Islam is the only true path to God, one has to choose between Sunni and Shiite faiths. To ask a rabbi or a minister or an imam to guide you in your beliefs, it seems to me, is comparable to asking an insurance salesman which kind of insurance you should buy. He may purport himself to be an impartial advisor and teacher, but it stretches human credibility to the breaking point (to me) to expect that he will, in the long run, do anything other than sell you *his* kind of insurance, the brand of insurance he has, self-evidently, "bought" for himself and the brand of insurance which it is his livelihood to "sell".

One of the things that I found to be fundamentally sound about Islam at the outset of my experience with it was the definition of the term "Islam" itself—submission to the Will of God—and the term "Muslim"—one who submits to the Will of God—which I see as "personalized" versions of the first pillar of Islam: acknowledgement of God's implicit sovereignty over everything. "All that is in the heaven and in the earth is God's", "all things came from God and to God they are returning". In computer terms, it's a "0" or a "1," in my view. You either believe in the pre-eminence of God's sovereignty ("1") or you believe in the pre-eminence of, well, anything else ("0"). The choice is your fundamental right (and, in my view, your primary responsibility) as an individual to make and you can make it only for yourself, not for others. Personally, I don't believe the choice allows of the sort of grey areas to which the secular humanist mind is inclined. As a rabbi once said on the television program *Passages* when asked about the astronomically large numbers of people who, as North American opinion polls continue to indicate, profess a belief in God, "Yes, but how many of them believe in *God*, and how many of them believe that 'God is love', 'God is nature', 'God is science'." That is, how many people attempt to redefine God to suit their own purposes—to change God from a specific Being into a completely neutral state of existence? How many individuals attempt to change God from the Absolute Playwright, Absolute Theatre Owner, Absolute Theatre Director whose Theatre is the Entire Universe into a part of the scenery, into the stage or into the theatre against which, upon which and/or within which those individuals enact their own small and fleeting lives? My own view is that there are two overall Realities. There is "1" Reality and there is "0" reality. Which Reality or reality you inhabit, which Reality or reality within which you reside (and which Reality or reality resides within you) is decided by whether you have consciously, knowingly chosen to submit yourself to the Will of God or whether that pre-eminent position in your life is occupied by anyone or anything else. I believe that submission to the Will of God is implicit in the Torah and in the Gospels (and in the Torah is implicitly directed at YHWH "God" and is implicit in God's directive to man to "subdue the earth" and that the Koran's frequent injunction against "joining gods with God" originates in opposition to the same misapprehension). I believe that this submission to the Will of God is what the Koran refers to when describing wealth and children as a temptation to man. How many husbands and fathers genuinely believe their first loyalty is to God, and how many pay only lip service to that loyalty? How many of them even recognize that their loyalty shifted with their marriage and with the birth of their children and that God now comes in a very distant third, behind the wife and kids?

What is the Will of God?

Back when I was living a "0" life, that would have seemed a very sensible question to me. Having chosen "1" for myself, I believe that the question is both unanswerable in human terms and largely, if not completely, irrelevant to the discussion. To *understand* the Will of God, as one *understands,* say, a mathematical formula, would, it seems to me, require deluding oneself that one was, oneself, an omniscient being—which (I hope we could agree) one isn't. In human terms, it seems to me that Reality, the Reality which is represented by God, the Reality which *is* God is inexplicable in human terms—and all other realities, which *are* explicable in human terms, are mere fragments of the single, all-encompassing Reality which is God's Reality. God is not Nature, but Nature is a small part of the Reality which is God. God is not Love, but Love is a small part of the Reality which is God, God is not Science, but Science is a small part of the Reality which is God. This, I believe, is a terrifying and alienating concept for the secular mind (which flatters itself that no reality is too large for its capacity to comprehend) and leads to accusation. "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely," is, at essence, a secular indictment of God. To which the only sensible answer, in my view, would be, "How would *you* know?" To sustain the indictment, to support the accusation, one would have to have first-hand experience with absolute power. "The more power a *human being* has the more he is likely to behave in a corrupt fashion as a result of it" is, I believe, a fairer and more demonstrable hypothesis—but is also worlds away from dealing with terms like "absolute power," and, again, (as most secular discussions of God tend to do) presupposes that the one who is doing the discussing and the One Who Is Being Discussed function on a comparable level of existence. On the one hand you have a being who is, on average, between five and six feet tall, who will, on average, live about seventy years and who didn't get perfect marks in high school. On the other hand you have an Infinite Being, Who Exists Everywhere Simultaneously, Has Absolute Power and Absolute Knowledge of All Things. *Cogito ergo sum.* I think, therefore I am. The larger implication, to me (and I suspect to most monotheists) is: well, fine, but *what* do you think? We all think (even feminists, on those rare occasions when they briefly stop worshipping their own emotions, think). *Islam,* it seems to me is the only appropriate extension from *Cogito ergo sum*:

(My own thought is limited and I speculate that my thought must have originated in Some Largest and/or Unlimited Thought) (that is, thought has to "come from" somewhere) ("little things" come from "Big Things" whether you are talking about babies coming out of adults or moons coming out of planets) (given that *less limited thought* i.e. a man's thought is always going to be preferable to *severely limited thought* i.e. a baby's thought when it comes to decision-making) (I, therefore, accept:) (that the submission of my *limited* thought to the directions of the Largest and/or *Unlimited* Thought is an inherently *good thought*, possibly the largest—which is to say, *least limited* thought—of which I am capable) (as a corollary, I reject:) (a. the choice of believing that there is no Largest and/or Unlimited Thought b. the choice of believing that, if a Largest and/or Unlimited Thought exists that it is inaccessible to me c. the choice of believing that my own thought did not originate in a Largest and/or Unlimited Thought d. the choice of believing that, if a Largest and/or Unlimited Thought exists it is unconcerned with, unaware of or hostile to my own limited thought) (that is, I reject the idea that a Largest and/or Unlimited Thought could be otherwise than beneficent) (and accept the fact that a Largest and/or Unlimited Thought would, by its implied beneficent Nature, communicate with limited thought: ergo, Scripture).

Put another way, it seems to me that to choose reality (*Cogito ergo sum)* over Reality (*Cogito ergo sum ergo Islam)* is to attempt to study astronomy seriously while refusing to accept any information obtained through a telescope, to implicitly suspect the telescope and to implicitly view the telescope as an *impediment* to accurate perception (because it occupies a space between the eye of the observer and the thing observed it is, *ipso facto,* by definition, an *impediment*) and to have faith only in what one can see unaided with the naked eye. To adhere, in other words, to the humanist view that "man is the measure of all things". The result, if one was scrupulously honest in documenting what one was able to see with one's naked eye, alone, would, of course, constitute a *kind* of astronomy, a scrupulously honest documentation of one's unaided subjective observations of the actions and motions of stars, the sun, the moon and a certain number of planets. But when that documentation is compared with the knowledge which results from *accepting as self-evident* that the telescope is a central, irreplaceable instrument in astronomy and the acceptance as a *given* that "the bigger the telescope, the better the information," there is no comparison. In terms of Reality, rather than reality (to me) God is very much analogous to the Biggest Telescope (Largest and/or Unlimited Thought) when compared with the naked eye (limited thought). Without God, you are thrashing about in a wading

pool within sight of the ocean. But it *is your* choice. The definition of the term "Islam" is not "*Knowledge of* the Will of God," it is "*submission to* the Will of God." It presupposes that God, as an omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent Being is better suited to directing your life than you are, just as the Hubble Space Telescope is better suited to the purposes of astronomy than is your naked eye—and by just, in my view, so comparably wide a margin.

What is the Will of God?

I think it self-evident that—given that each human being is different—God's Will, as it applies to each individual person who chooses to submit themselves to His Will, is different. One of the reasons that I am suspicious of organized religion and keep organized religion at arm's length is that it seems to me that the Jewish, Christian and Muslim hierarchies (or, as I see them, "hierarchies") accept as a given that God's Will is the same for everyone. In my view, the "hierarchies" and those who support them have simply traded one collectivist misapprehension—the 19th century notion that "if God's Will was to be done on the earth all of our lives would closely resemble those of the individuals who occupy the religious hierarchies" (that is, we should all live like priests, nuns, rabbis and imams)—and have simply traded that collectivist misapprehension for the (what is to me, anyway) *equally* specious collectivist view that we should marginalize the presence of God and His scriptures, his Prophets and his messengers in our lives and instead become "baby worshippers," "marriage worshippers" and "family worshippers". That is, that we should subscribe instead to the collectivist sensibility which has resulted from the shift in emphasis from the clergy to the laity in Judaism and Christianity and which has resulted in the (perhaps terminal) erosion of those two faiths into well-meaning but misguided…Maternalisms?...which, at essence, deplore God, deplore His scriptures, deplore His Prophets and his messengers. Which, in short, deplore everything except babies, marriage and family (and which deplores even marriage and family unless the wife-and-mother is in charge or it involves homosexuals). I likewise endeavour to keep at arm's length anyone who purports to be an intermediary between God and man. On a purely personal, purely subjective level, I think it was and is God's Will that I would attempt to self-publish 300 issues of a comic book. I do not extrapolate from that that it is God's Will that *everyone* should attempt to self-publish 300 issues of a comic book. When I look at the entrenched hierarchies of the great monotheistic faiths—both in their much deplored Patriarchal forms and in their current Maternalistic forms into which they have (as I see it) *eroded* I see just such an extrapolation, a perpetuation of the view that it is the purpose of religious faith to determine how everyone should live and (more perniciously) whom they should interpose at the highest levels of their own lives between God and themselves. I am in complete agreement with those who believe that an entrenched priesthood is a most unlikely and unhelpful candidate for the position, but I am also of the view (to say the least) that I don't see our present entrenchment of white-muslin-and-votive-candle-feminism or the elevation of Oprah Winfrey to beatification (although I'm sure her television program has "healed" many of her followers in exactly those limited and secular categories of "healing" with which they are almost exclusively concerned) as any great improvement. And this is, in fact, what I admire about the term "Islam," the implied submission to the Will of God, *without the interpolation of an intermediary between the individual and God.*

Speaking again, personally, speaking (I'll give away the game right here) *subjectively*—the only way that I believe any kind of faith can be discussed—I haven't the faintest idea how much of it I've gotten right and how much of it I've gotten wrong. The, so far, 282 of the 300 issues, I mean. Or my life, for that matter. I don't think I'm *supposed* to know until the Last Day. Knowing would, I believe, defeat the intrinsic purpose of life: which, to me, consists *not* in *knowing*, but in *choosing*. Choosing what I think is right and, hopefully, doing it. Not what necessarily *appeals* to me, not what I think I would most *enjoy,* but what I think is right. What *I* think that God thinks is right. Not what Gloria Steinem thinks is right, or what George Bush thinks is right. Or what a priest or Pope John Paul II or a rabbi or an imam thinks is right. It would not surprise me in the least to find out I'm doing really, really badly (which would be the consensus view in the feminist society in which I live) and it would not surprise me to find out I'm doing really, really well. I think I would be surprised to find out what parts of my life were "high water" marks in the eyes of God and what parts of my life were "low points". That is, I take it as a given that, like all people, in submitting myself to the Will of God, I understand His Will in my life imperfectly—less imperfectly at some times and more imperfectly at others, but always, imperfectly. This, to me, is the meaning of *jihad.* "Striving in the path of God," the usually excruciating and seldom enjoyable process of the practical application of

"submitting oneself to the Will of God". *Jihad:* overcoming the rationalisations that kept me smoking cigarettes for two years after submitting myself to the Will of God. *Jihad:* overcoming my profound apprehension at even attempting to fast in the month of Ramadan. *Jihad:* overcoming my unreasonable attachment to an electronic device (television) whose puerile, vacuous and moronic contents disgusted and revolted me better than 99% of the time. My plate was and is full with things that need to be done and things that need to be undone if I am to align myself with my own perception of the Will of God. It's more than a full-time occupation, it is a near-Sisyphean lifelong task.

So, it should come as no great shock that (in my view) for me, or for *anyone*, to pretend to "muck into" the lives of others, given that all of us, as imperfect beings understand the Will of God in our own lives imperfectly really seems ludicrous to me. I see no reason to exclude priests, ministers, bishops, popes, nuns, rabbis, imams or ayatollahs from that blanket statement. They are all imperfect people who have been selected—or elected by imperfect people for their position. To me, "mucking into" the lives of others (returning to my previous metaphor) makes about as much sense as trying to help someone see through *their* telescope by sticking *my* telescope on the end of it. Good theory (I suppose) but, in practical terms, less than helpful. The extent of the advice that I could give would be: submit yourself to the Will of God and from then on, you're both on your own and in the custody of God. God can help you. I can't. I would feel safe in saying that there is nothing you won't experience that isn't a very common experience once you have submitted to the Will of God—exhilaration alternating with discouragement, genuine submission alternating with half-hearted submission, stubbornness, rebellion, resentment, joy, despair, astonishment, unremitting boredom, tranquility. That's what I've experienced, across the whole spectrum and back again. I can't say my life has improved in any conventional sense, but then I've always found life to be very hard and largely unrewarding work so, in a sense, I've really just changed from leading a completely *pointless* life of hard and largely unrewarding work to leading a life of hard and largely unrewarding work that has as its aim doing what I think is right in the eyes of God— "striving in the path of God" or, at least, striving *to* "strive in the path of God"—to resist temptation in a world that is largely devoted to multiplying and strengthening temptation. I don't envision reward—or even "reward"—partly because I really don't think I'm very good at this and partly because of my own experience that life is implicitly unrewarding (I do, however, also accept the fact that once you see almost everything the world has to offer as a corrupting temptation—as I tend to do—it becomes very difficult to *be* rewarded in any conventional sense of the term). Most of the time, I can't picture how the "next life" would differ significantly from this one. The Koranic verses about the *houris*, the "wives of stainless purity" (a subtle but significant difference from the "virgins" they are described as being in the Western press—which I would attribute, in no small part, to the West's profound shortage of "wives of stainless purity" and consequent incomprehension of the very idea of what a "stainless" wife might be) (even, you know, *theoretically)* (say "stainless" to anyone in the West and the first thing they'll think of is steel) promised in the next world, strike me as hyperbolic—as opposed to those verses which depict this world as the "farmland for the hereafter," resonating with the Gospel's promise that "many are called, few are chosen." What I envision is more hard and largely unrewarding work, larger and more subtle temptations, more at stake and less chance of success. My *preference* would be for no afterlife whatsoever: complete oblivion, to cease to exist (which puts me very much at odds with the inmates of this particular asylum who—whether "0" or "1"—seem always to long for "more life, longer life" in this world even when they know that it is unattainable) but I'm not sure how much of my preference is "flesh-thinking" (I hold to the view that if your existence has manifested itself within a physical form you have either eroded from a higher state and/or have made a series of very stupid "0" reality decisions somewhere along the spiritual line). Perhaps once my flesh is actually dead, I will be able to perceive the nature of life more accurately and prefer life to oblivion, but right now? No, definitely not. It took me a while to recognize this not as a suicidal impulse (I didn't give myself life so I don't think it's mine to throw away) but analogous, rather, to having made elaborate preparations and large sacrifices to attend a party which turns out, upon your arrival, to be excruciatingly boring and not worth a fraction of what you had to give up to attend. The fact that you have to stay at the party for as long as eighty or ninety years, it seems to me, only emphasizes the level of stupidity inherent in your choice. I've been at this party for forty-six years now and I, for one, am more than happy to leave it at any time God sees fit (Anyone you want to say goodbye to? No. Anything you want to take with you? No. Anything you're going to miss? No.)

In choosing to submit myself to the Will of God and his absolute sovereignty, it occurred to me

very early on that Islam was—and is—intended to be more inclusive than it proved to be once the descendants of Abu Sofyan and Hind got a hold of it.

Consider the first of the five pillars of Islam: Acknowledgement of God's sovereignty and acknowledgement of Muhammad as His prophet. On the face of it, this appears to be "Islamocentric" and implicitly anti-Jewish and/or anti-Christian—and it has certainly been viewed that way for centuries. However, in my view, far from being anti-Christian, it seems to me to pose a very sensible question that Christians seems loathe to address and which I mentioned earlier in this series. Do you not suppose that God has—and *had*—absolute sovereignty over Jesus and Mary? It seems to me another "0" and "1" question over which Christianity has been tying itself up in theological knots for two thousand years trying to figure out how to make the answer simultaneously "0" (Because Jesus was God, the question is irrelevant) *and* "1" (Jesus was a man but co-equivalent with God so Jesus and God were equal). Even if you allow for Jesus being God's son (which I don't, but for the sake of argument, let's discuss the point in purely Christian terms), isn't a son correctly submissive to the will of his father? I mean, sure, many—if not most—sons aren't, but isn't submissiveness to the father's will the ideal? And isn't that, according to the Gospels, exactly what Jesus—both the Synoptic Jesus and the Jesus of John's Gospel—spent a great deal of time preaching: that he was doing the Will of his Father, that he was doing the will of He who sent him into the world? Did he ever preach the opposite? That *God* should submit Himself to the will of *Jesus*? No, of course not. I do think it unfortunate that the conventional Islamic acknowledgement of God's sovereignty includes the phrase "and Muhammad is His messenger". Not because I don't believe it (I do) but because the *phrasing* leaves a great deal to be desired, making it sound as if Muhammad was God's *only* messenger. Unfortunate, particularly, because Muslims don't believe that. The Koran explicitly names any number of individuals from the Torah and the Gospels who are included in the ranks of God's prophets and messengers. At the same time, I can understand that Muslims would be reluctant to modify the first pillar into "There is no God but God and Muhammad is *one of* His messengers," because it does seem to, you know, rather blunt the point. In my own prayers, I've chosen "There is no God but God and Muhammad is His last messenger and seal of prophets." I've often wondered, how much of a problem would that be for Jews and Christians to incorporate into their own faith? For an Orthodox Jew, as an example, would acknowledgement that Muhammad was God's last messenger jeopardize their own anticipation of Meshiach? Is Meshiach considered to be in the same category of prophet as Isaiah or Jeremiah, or does the mere fact of his exalted status take him out of the realm of the prophets and into the sort of realm occupied by Jesus in Christianity? And even leaving aside the "last" messenger part, after fourteen hundred years, don't even Orthodox Jews acknowledge that Muhammad was a prophet of God? For a Fundamentalist Christian does the fact that Jesus has promised to return on the Last Day allow for Muhammad's acknowledgement as God's last messenger and seal of prophets? Or could it be acknowledged because, indisputably—in *this* world—Jesus lived six centuries before Muhammad's time? For me, of course, describing Muhammad as God's "last messenger" causes no problem at all. Of all the pivotal figures in the histories of Judaism, Christianity and Islam since 632, the nearest that I could see as being in the category of a messenger of God would be Martin Luther. And in the case of Martin Luther, I think it indisputable that—in calling into question the corruption that had been perpetrated against the Word of God by the degraded papacy of the Middle Ages—while he exhibited great bravery and profound faith in the face of nearly universal opposition and personal peril, he didn't *per se* bring anything *new* to the monotheistic table. There is no "Gospel of Martin Luther," no additional Book which has been "sent down" that could be considered comparable to the Bible and the Koran. Unless you consider the Book of Mormon canonical, which I very much don't.

Two of Islam's five pillars, prayer and fasting in the sacred month of Ramadan, are bound inextricably together in my own perceptions because the first time I tried praying five times a day was during my first Ramadan fast in 1999, so I'd like to address the two of them together:

If you'll recall, way, way, back at the beginning of this series of essays (back when the earth was, as it were, still cooling) it was my dissatisfying experience with the Anglican Church and the consequent sense of "something missing" when I stopped going to church which first led me to consider "fasting in the sacred month". If you'll also recall, praying five times a day seemed to me—as I contemplated fasting in Ramadan (particularly with the ritual ablutions, change of clothing, etc.)—excessive. What I *anticipated* with praying five times a day was that it would have the character of a marathon, an endurance rally. I assumed that, in this, it would have much in common with getting

up at 8:30 every Sunday morning to put on a suit-and-tie and to struggle off to church (at first, through the always unpredictable Canadian winter wonderland and, subsequently, to sit in that same suit-and-tie for an hour and a half during the sweltering summer months in a church that wasn't air conditioned) to listen to homey little stories about mum, dad and the kids. That is, I considered fasting in the sacred month would be the same as I assumed all religious activities were: largely unpleasant rituals through which (if you weren't a mum, a dad or a kid) you gritted your teeth, sucked it up, bit the bullet, etc. etc. I thought that unpleasantness was the *point* of religious activities. Much to my surprise, what I had expected to be an ordeal turned out to be anything but. In fact, for me, it served to clarify very vividly the difference between "0" reality life and "1" Reality life. Not that I noticed it at the time. At the time, it just seemed an unexpected bonus that what I had thought was going to be an ordeal had turned out to be not that difficult, that I was going to be able to manage the twenty-nine days of praying and fasting with far less effort and exertion than I thought would be required. I had also given up caffeine, alcohol, meat, dairy products and masturbation for the sacred month. If you had asked me when I began that first Ramadan fast whether I would make it through the twenty-nine days, the answer, honestly, would have been "no". My thought in starting the fast was that I would give it a try and see how far I could get. I hoped I could make it through two weeks and I hoped that I would try again the following year and keep trying until I made it through the whole twenty-nine days—and (crucially) that I would then be able to make it through the full twenty-nine in the years following. Ever since I began reading the Bible six years ago, I have never wanted to "take a step down," that is, to set myself to doing something, to do it for a while and then let it slide, as had happened with my church attendance. Having resolved to become a genuine churchgoer, I was (to say the least) not terribly impressed that I had only made it through six months. If you had asked me during the first two weeks of my first Ramadan fast what I was thinking about, the answer would have been "an ice-cold beer and a cheeseburger". That, to me, was the point of the fast—*NOT doing* things and how *LONG* I could *not do* them.

It wasn't until December of 2000 and my second Ramadan fast that—much to my own amusement—I could remember the first couple of days of my first experience with any clarity. The first couple of days, cranky about having to get up *well before dawn* to have something to eat and then being unable to eat or drink for the rest of the day, by the time the sun was going down, filled with bitterness and resentment…

[Let me interrupt myself to include a news item from Cairo which made me chuckle during last year's Ramadan, *"23 die in car crashes linked to Ramadan fast":* "Twenty-three people died in two automobile accidents near Cairo in incidents attributed to speeding at sunset just before the end of the Ramadan fast, police said yesterday. Seventeen were killed and 13 injured when two cars collided on Wednesday near al-Fashn, 140 km south of Cairo. Six were killed and 11 injured near Beni Suef, 100 km south." It was nice, on the one hand, to know that I wasn't alone in my crankiness and nice to know, as well, that I lived in a part of the world where that level of crankiness at sunset wasn't a near-universal condition which put everyone's safety at risk.]

…at this hard, hard Islamic row I had to hoe (poor me!). As I usually do, I would buy my dinner on the way home. And what I would buy would be three desserts. Three non-chocolate (no caffeine!) things made up of various kinds of sugar and varieties of fat in a variety of shapes—layer upon layer—which I would devour in several large bites the *minute* (c'mon. *C'MON!)* the sun had dipped below the horizon. And with a (Hah! *THERE!*) sense that a certain amount of Justice had been restored to the universe, I would sulk off to bed. A couple of days of that brought about the anatomical repercussion you would expect (GAH! POOR ME!) and then I switched to dried fruit, salads, and things of that kind. The interesting thing was that—having completely forgotten what those first couple of days of my first fast had been like—the following year, I did the same thing! And it wasn't until the expected anatomical repercussion hit a second time that I remembered, Oh, right. This. I did this last year, too, didn't I? Now, the reason that I forgot about it by the second year was that the difference in quality between praying and fasting in Ramadan in the *second week* as compared to the *first couple of days* was like the difference between night and day. Not only did the fasting and praying become easier, but *everything* became easier. My stamina increased dramatically, all my little aches and pains vanished, I slept soundly straight through the night, I awoke refreshed and eager to go to work, I was more alert, I was more patient, crises great and small had no impact on me whatsoever. Walking felt like gliding, a sensation which I hadn't experienced since I was about ten years old. "I remember being like this," I kept thinking, "I remember *my life* feel-

ing like this: *before* I had experienced masturbation, *before* I had experienced sex, *before* I had experienced drugs, *before* I had experienced alcohol." (I was also aware that my newly recovered state was the one that I had wanted masturbation, sex, drugs and alcohol to return me to). What was interesting was that—when the twenty-nine days of my first Ramadan fast was up, *I didn't want to stop.* Having dreaded fasting, I now found myself dreading *not* fasting. My stamina won't be as great! My aches and pains are going to come back! I won't sleep as soundly! I won't be as refreshed in the morning! I won't be as alert! I actually kept going for about another week-and-a-half (and found out later that that's something of a "no-no" in Islam) and expected that I would, you know, *crash.* Like coming down off of acid (which was the closest analogous experience—in terms of profound impact—which I had to compare it to). But, of course, fasting in Ramadan comes very much from the other side of reality—that is, from Reality—so there *was* no *crash.* What I did experience was comparable to having spent a month with my head above water—having been previously unaware that my head and the rest of me had been *under*water for more than twenty-nine years. As I ate my first food during daylight hours, ate my first roast beef sandwich, my first chocolate chip cookie, drank my first beer, each event pulled my head a little further down until I was living *underwater* again, which over a period of a week or two—seemed strange and then just seemed to be the way that I had always been. Drinking beer gradually ceased to be this peculiar activity—where I had to keep reminding myself of what (exactly) the theory *was* behind drinking a liquid which had, at essence, "gone bad" (and tasted like it)—and, gradually, became again this thing that seemed to be a really *good* idea, particularly after a long week where I had all of these, you know, aches and pains and I wasn't, you know, sleeping well and there were all these, you know, big and little crises that, you know, "got" to me.

After several days (or perhaps a week of two) of reacquainting myself with "underwater" life, it became apparent to me that, once more, in my life there was "something missing". Clearly, what was missing was the purer state which I had experienced during my Ramadan fast which (however) kept bumping up against my certainty that I was not intended—it was not God's Will—that I would live that way. The purer state which I had experienced had begun to erode almost immediately after the formal end of Ramadan (in early January that year). Whatever the reason for that erosion, it existed outside of my ability to comprehend it, like an unwritten law having greater force that any written law. It took me a while to consider the idea that I might actually begin praying five times a day simply as a way of life, the way of *my* life (I had returned to only reciting my prayer in the morning after getting ready for work and in the evening just before bed) as a way of filling that "something missing" hole in my world. It was an interesting experience making my series of choices—choosing not to perform the ritual ablutions, not to change clothing, to not observe the specific Muslim prayer times (calibrated to the minute: the sheet of Ramadan prayer times I had received from *Reflections on Islam* were for "Toronto and Vicinity" and noted that to each prayer time in Guelph you should add 3 minutes, in Hamilton 2 minutes, in London 8 minutes, in Waterloo 4 minutes. The beginning of Ramadan is also "subject to moon sighting," that is subject to the sighting of the full moon by Muslim authorities. Even though, in the 20th century, we know—to the minute—when the moon becomes "full" in any geographic location on the globe, Islam still takes into consideration that if God chooses another time, just this once, we must be prepared) but to pray, instead, at the approximate times of Fajr, pre-dawn—described in the Koran as the hour in which it first becomes possible, by natural light, to discern the difference between a white and a black thread (which is undoubtedly the case in the Arabian Peninsula but, trust me, that at 5:56 am in Canada in December it is impossible, by natural light, to differentiate between one's hand in front of one's face and, say, the bottom of a mine-shaft, let alone a white and a black thread)—Zuhr, noon-time, Asr, mid-afternoon, Maghrib, sunset and Isha, evening, when the last traces of sunset have faded. And so that was what I did. Of course my Fajr prayers soon slipped from "pre-dawn" to "dawn" to "close-to-dawn" to "morning" (and, on Saturday mornings, after being out until 2 am, "mid-morning") on the rare occasions where I have some kind of social engagement where I'm apt to have a glass of wine or two, I compress Asr, Maghrib and Isha into early afternoon, mid-afternoon and late afternoon. The further I get from Ramadan in the calendar the more…flexible…my prayer-times become, the more apt I am to stretch three beers on Friday night into five beers (and maybe a shot of Jack Daniel's) (or two). At the halfway point (right around now, in fact) I begin to develop a genuine longing for Ramadan—the ritual ablutions, the change of clothing, the specific prayer times, the day-long fasts—and the giant Muslim NO! sign which is, by my own choice, attached to it. Twenty-

nine days, once a year, where I no longer have to ask myself if two coffees are too many, if I've been eating too much chocolate, if I've been eating too much meat, eating too few vegetables, masturbating too often, ogling too many pretty young girls. For twenty-nine days, by choice, I take those decisions out of my own hands and (two weeks in) begin to re-experience who it is that I actually am, under all these layers of small, creeping vices and their attendant rationalisations, and their attendant rationalisations' levels of attendant anxieties, and their attendant anxieties' levels of spiritual "discomfitedness"? You know, that stuffy feeling, the feeling as if your skin is on too tight? Yes, exactly. That feeling that you're probably, as a North American or European, feeling right now. That feeling that has made pharmaceuticals, recreational drugs, pornography, self-help books and holistic medicine the multi-to-the-nth-power-billion-dollar industries which they are today. Ramadan which, for me, is now and *(inshallah)* in all the years which remain of my life indisputably "home base," the way of thinking and the state to which I return once a year. Because there is no better experience, to me, than to experience being ten years old again at the age of forty-six.

Anyway, it has occurred to me, over the course of three fasts in the sacred month—speaking as someone who has studied Judaism, Christianity and Islam—that the five pillars of Islam seem to offer the greatest ecumenical possibilities of the three monotheistic religions. That is, I think Jews and Christians could both observe at least four of the five pillars, while leaving every other element of Judaism and Christianity intact and unchanged. Although Islam prohibits the consumption of alcohol, the prohibition of the consumption of alcohol is not one of the five pillars.

Of the two remaining pillars, the *zakat,* of course, I have addressed on several previous occasions and I still consider it to be an inherently good idea for each individual to contribute 2.5% of his or her accumulated wealth to feeding the poor in his or her city, town or region. I also don't think (I may be wrong) it should be that terribly difficult, in the ecumenical spirit in which I'm discussing these issues, to get synagogues and churches to agree to institute the *zakat.* Or for secular humanists to go along with it, for that matter. It probably *is*...terribly difficult, I mean. But I honestly can't see a good reason why it *should* be.

Coincidentally, the remaining pillar, the *hajj*—the pilgrimage to Mecca—was the subject of one of my few direct contacts with the Muslim world, a letter which I wrote to the host of *Reflections on Islam,* Ezz E. Gadd (who frequently answers viewers' questions on the air). Essentially, what I asked was: speaking as a person who believes in God's sovereignty, who believes that Muhammad was His last messenger and seal of Prophets, who prays five times daily, who pays the stated alms and who fasts in Ramadan, but who also believes that Judaism and Christianity are completely valid faiths in their present form, would I be considered a Muslim, insofar as making the *hajj* was concerned? And if not, by whose authority would Mr. Gadd claim that I wasn't?

(I am an incorrigible troublemaker: it interests me to take questions from other monotheistic debates and apply them to other situations: in this case freely adapting the Scribes' and Pharisees' question to the Synoptic Jesus when they asked "by whose authority" he healed the blind, the lame and the lepers. His reply, of course was that he would answer their question if they would answer a question of his own, as to whether the Scribes and Pharisees believed that John the Baptist's ministry was divinely inspired or purely an "earthly" preaching. As the Synoptic Gospels tell us, the Scribes and Pharisees declined to answer because they knew that John was almost universally regarded by the people as a Prophet and they feared a backlash if they said that his was an earthly ministry—and they couldn't say his ministry was divinely inspired because the obvious question would be, Well, why didn't *you* follow him, then? When they said, "We cannot tell," Jesus basically said, "Then I cannot tell either by whose authority I do these things." Which got him out of a jam, no question, but which doesn't really add up in any logically sequential fashion—unless you draw the inference that what the Synoptic Jesus was saying was, "We're both working the same side of the street. You guys are afraid of the people if you tell the truth and I'm afraid of *you* if I tell the truth"—but, then, that's the Synoptic Jesus for you.)

The correct Muslim answer to my question (which I already knew, so I don't know why I asked it) was that Mr. Gadd's authority—as it is the authority for all theological Muslim answers to theological Muslim questions—is "sacred scriptures and prophetic traditions". As I've already said, I can go along with the sacred scripture part—the Koran—but "prophetic traditions" always sets off alarm bells and warning flags for me. A "prophetic tradition" that can be directly traced to Abu Bakr or Omar? I think I could bring myself to granting that authority. A "prophetic tradition" that began with Moawia or any of the other hereditary caliphs descended from Abu Sofyan and Hind? There, I would

have a problem.

I was surprised and rather pleased when I got a phone call from *Reflections on Islam* telling me that my letter had been selected to be read and answered on the air the following Sunday. I was even more surprised when I watched the program and found out that Mr. Gadd's answer (based on "sacred scriptures and prophetic traditions") was yes, I would be considered a Muslim and could thus enter the sacred precincts and perform the rituals of the *hajj*. Obviously, it was the answer I wanted but (no big surprise, knowing me) once I had it, I found that I disagreed with it. Perhaps I idealize Islam a bit much, but I do tend to think that unless I was very clear in my own mind that I was never going to touch a drop of alcohol again for the rest of my life (I like to say that I am at least three beers a week away from being a good Muslim) and unless I regularly went to the mosque in Waterloo and prayed in the prescribed Muslim fashion, in my own view, I had no business venturing anywhere near the sacred precincts of Mecca. Of course, a year or so ago my parents took me to a restaurant that is run by a Muslim family (my parents having mentioned that their son was fasting in Ramadan, the family was eager to see this North American freak of nature for themselves) and I asked one of the sons (who was a waiter) if he had ever performed the *hajj* and he smiled and said, "No, not yet. I haven't committed enough sins." I burst out laughing. It's believed that after executing all the prescribed rituals of the *hajj*, the pilgrim returns home as cleansed of his sins as a newborn baby. *My* idea of Islam doesn't include putting off the *hajj* until later in life so you can get enough sins "under your belt" to make it worth the airfare. I'm sure, just given basic human nature, that he's not the only Muslim that looks at it that way. And, perhaps, by that very human standard, I *would* qualify as a Muslim. So, assuming that Mr. Gadd was correct and his view would be shared by (gulp) Saudi immigration officials and (gulp gulp) the guardians of the sacred precincts—and I'm *not* correct—then even the fifth pillar of Islam is open to a much wider ecumenical interpretation than my own.

What I'm driving at (in my usual long-winded fashion) is that—so far as I can see—the conversion of the world to Islam is really not *all* that unattainable, depending on how you examine the logistics of the problem. It is unattainable right now, sure, particularly in the United States where you are not likely to get anything approaching a favourable reaction to anything Islamic—now or for many years in the future: at least for as long as it takes the War on Terrorism to curtail, suppress and/or eliminate Wahabite Islam. How long a period that will be really, I think, depends on how long it takes for the lessons learned from the aftermath of 11 September to sink in. I'm thinking particularly of the central lesson which I addressed earlier in this instalment: the mind-boggling military hegemony which the United States holds in the world and which the United States demonstrated in Afghanistan and which the United States will not (Democrat or Republican) be surrendering to any other nation anytime soon. I'm sure the lesson hasn't fully sunk in with the Arab dictators who are the despotic heirs of the Koreish—the *un*spiritual sons of Abu Sofyan and Hind—the lesson is too large to be fully absorbed in mere months by parochial minds which have been insulated from geopolitical reality (what used to be called *realpolitik)* for too long. But there is no question in my mind that it *will* sink in (sooner, rather than later). When it does, I think Osama bin Laden's words "when people see a strong horse and a weak horse, they will naturally choose the strong horse"—representing as they do a sentiment near and dear to both the Arab and Muslim heart—will become more poignant in the coming years as Arabs and Muslims come to realize that if the dream of universal Islam is to be realized, the "line of least resistance" could well involve the integration of the five pillars of Islam into Judaic and Christian worship. Given the virtually universal belief in the freedom of the individual and in the pre-eminence of individual human freedoms over the authority of the state which is now shared by Jews and Christians of all denominations, and postulating a Judaic and Christian future (however distant) in which *individual* Jews and *individual* Christians would both acknowledge and practice the five pillars of Islam, a future—for all spiritual and practical purposes—in which Jews and Christians, in addition to *being* Jews and Christians would *also be* Muslims…I don't think it entirely outside the realm of possibility—were the momentum of society to begin moving in that direction and were the Koreish-style corrupt Arab and Muslim dictatorships to fail to democratize fast enough—that Islam might very well find itself, for all intents and purposes, *absorbed* by Judaism and Christianity. That Judaism and Christianity, in tandem, might yet prove to be the "strong horse," of what might yet prove to be a virtually universal—and *freedom-based*—monotheistic faith.

SHORT LIST
THE SECOND ANNUAL
HOWARD E. DAY MEMORIAL PRIZE

The Short List has been selected by Gerhard from those works submitted for consideration by the exhibitors at the 3rd Annual Small Press & Alternative Comics Expo (SPACE) in Columbus, Ohio.

The Winner of the Second Annual Day Prize will be selected by Dave Sim. The prize consists of a five-hundred-dollar cash award, a commemorative plaque and an eight-page excerpt from the winning entry to appear in the December issue of *Cerebus* (issue 285).

The Short List nominees have all agreed to make available to anyone mentioning the Day Prize in their letter an autographed copy of their nominated work for the price (in U.S. dollars) indicated below their listing. The works are listed alphabetically, by title.

Amelia Rules!
Second issue
Jimmy Gownley
Renaissance Press
2906 Duke St.
Marrisburg, PA
17111
renpress.com
(two dollars and ninety-five cents)

Askari Hodari
Second issue
Glenn Brewer
(Scott Woods, Arron Putnam, Steve K, Editors)
427 Oak St. Apt. #B1
Columbus, Ohio
43215
Askarihodari.com
(three dollars)

Insignificant Gods
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